OLD!

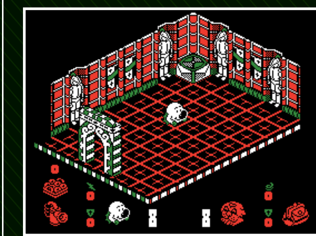
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

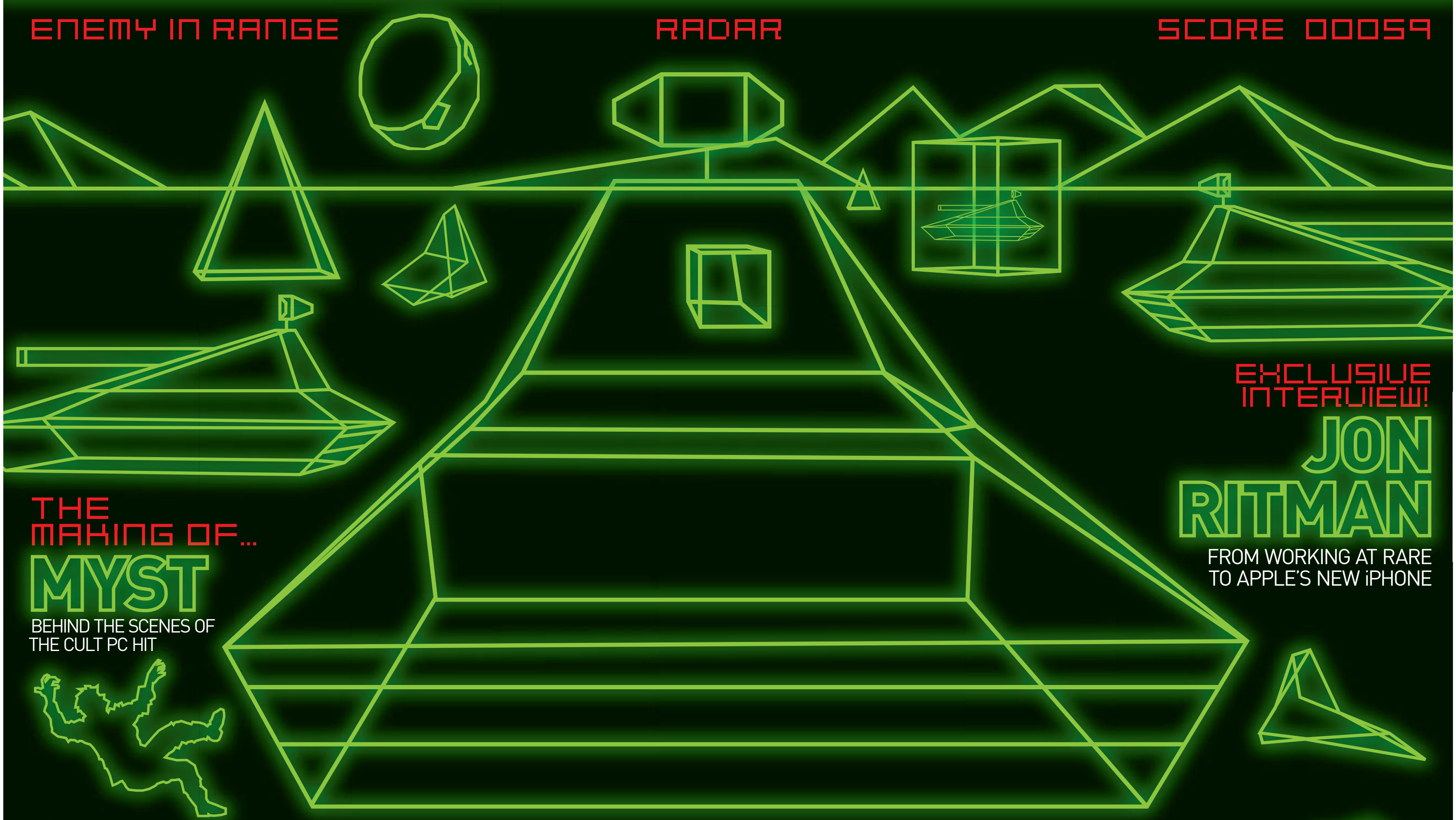
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THE BIG FEATURE
HEAD OVER HEELS
THE ISOMETRIC HIT THAT'S HEAD AND HEELS ABOVE THE REST





EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!
JON RITMAN
FROM WORKING AT RARE TO APPLE'S NEW iPHONE

THE MAKING OF...
MYST
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE CULT PC HIT

BATTLEZONE
HOW ATARI'S WIRE-FRAME CLASSIC SCORED A DIRECT HIT

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

WING COMMANDER
CREATOR CHRIS ROBERTS DISCUSSES THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF HIS HIT PC FRANCHISE

AMSTRAD CPC 6128
WHY SIR ALAN SUGAR'S MACHINE WAS MORE THAN JUST A FANCY 664

ACCOLADE
FROM ATARI TO ACTIVISION TO FIRST IN THE PHONEBOOK

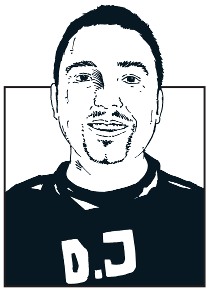
BALDUR'S GATE
WHY THE PC CLASSIC REMAINS ONE OF THE BEST RPGS OF ALL TIME

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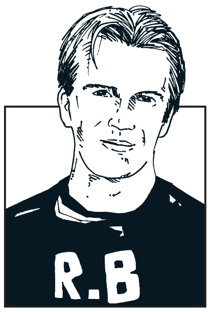
THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE JON RITMAN GAME



DARRAN JONES

I've been absolutely in love with *Monster Max* over the past few weeks, although I'm still no closer to completing the damn thing.
Expertise: Hiding new Blu-ray releases from the missus
Currently playing:
Fable II (honestly it's like being married)
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



RICHARD BURTON

Match Day on the Spectrum. After school we would hold tournaments with bragging rights for the week (and a quarter of sherbet dips) going to the triumphant victor. Running commentary was also obligatory… GOALLLLLL…
Expertise: Stuff, things, nonsense and stuff
Currently playing:
Astro Wars
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



STUART HUNT

For me it has to be *Monster Max*, it was such a brilliant game. Definitely one of the best Game Boy games you can come by.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Rock Band 2
Favourite game of all time:
Rock Band 2



CRAIG GRANNELL

On the basis of time spent trying to crack it, *Head Over Heels* is mine. That said, *Monster Max* on the Game Boy is a much-underappreciated Ritman gem.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Lots of cheap iPhone games
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



MARTYN CARROLL

Head Over Heels. No contest. I enjoyed this more than any of Ultimate's isometric adventures, and not just because it featured a remote-controlled Prince Charles robot. A true 8-bit classic.
Expertise: Peeks and pokes
Currently playing:
Super Stardust Portable
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DRURY

Head Over Heels, which on a semantic level, not only manages be metonymically self-reflexive, it also acts as a metaphor for Charles's subjugation of Diana. Didn't you spot that? See gamestudies.org for enlightenment…
Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Far Cry 2 (still)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES

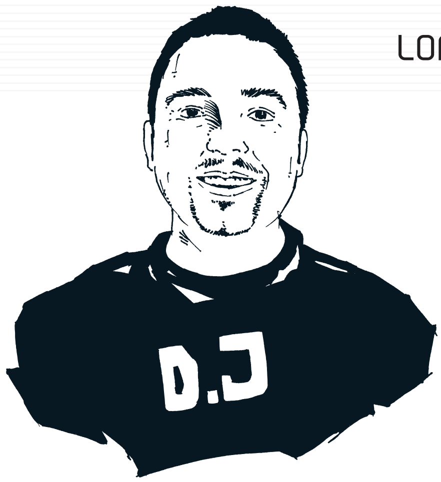
Forget 3pm on a Saturday, the best football games were being played in my house on a Sunday afternoon on *Match Day II*. My brother and I formed our own two-team league. Suffice to say, I came bottom.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Fallout 3
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



ASHLEY DAY

Head Over Heels. Not only is it Ritman's best game but it's probably the single greatest game of the 8-bit micro era, too. It's got it all: ingenious puzzles, loveable characters and an enemy that looks like a cross between Prince Charles and a Dalek!
Expertise: The games of Team 17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Mirror's Edge
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III

LOADING...



Somebody asked me the other day why I was still working on Retro Gamer. The answer was easy. "Because I love it", I said. As we enter the start of a new year, I looked back at the things I wanted to achieve when I first took over the magazine. I wanted to ensure that the enthusiasm of the original team was still apparent, I wanted to interview the legendary Isuke for a making-of *Strider* and I wanted to interview the gaming legends that had such a big impact on my early gaming life.

Some of those things I've achieved, while others I'm coming tantalisingly close to, but rather than simply sit back and rest on my laurels, the beginning of 2009 simply reminds me that there are a lot of things that **Retro Gamer** needs to cover. So here's my new year's resolution for the coming year (which will be either early or late depending on whether you're a regular subscriber or not). I promise that we'll continue to get exclusive interviews on classic games (*Space Invaders* and *R-Type* being our next big-hitters). I also promise that we'll continue to improve the mag, most of all though I'll ensure that you, the readers, are able to have your voice heard as much as possible. After all, **Retro Gamer** is as much your magazine as it is ours.

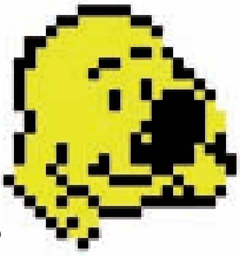
Happy New Year.



Enjoy the magazine



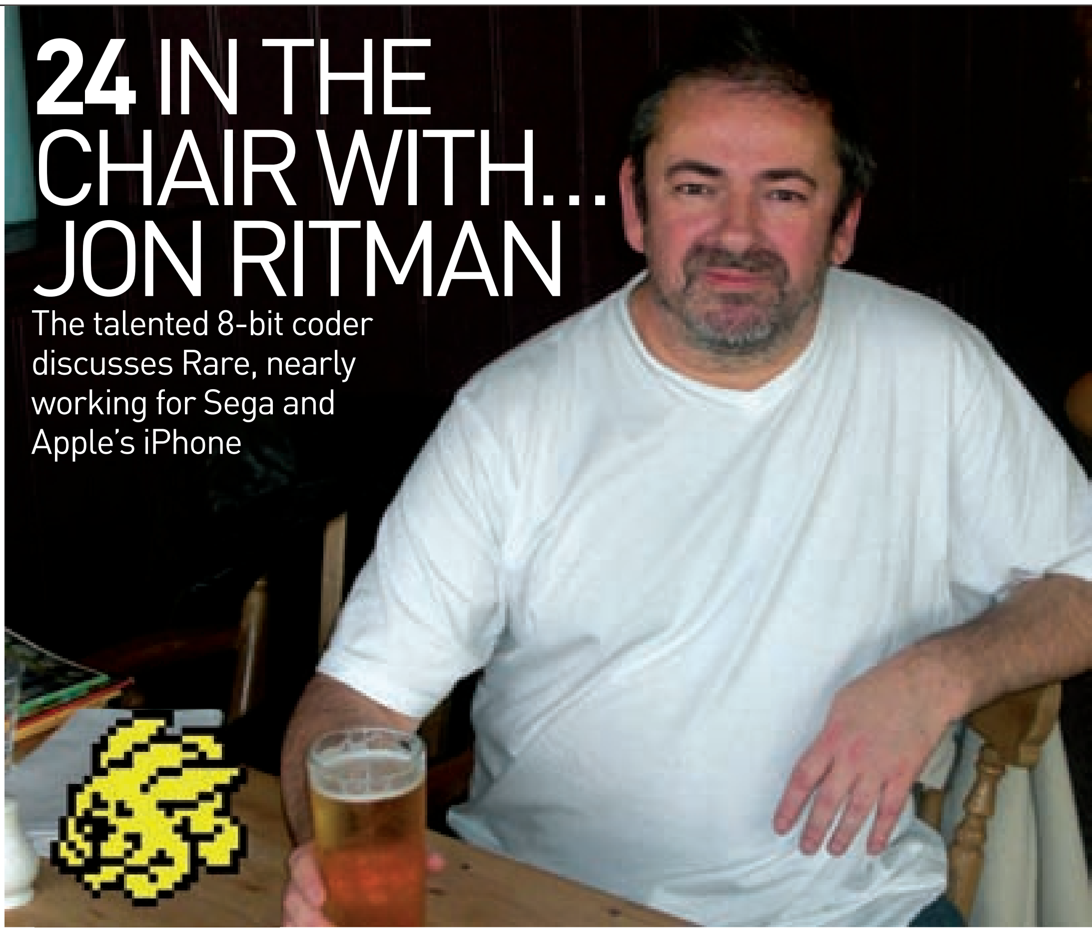
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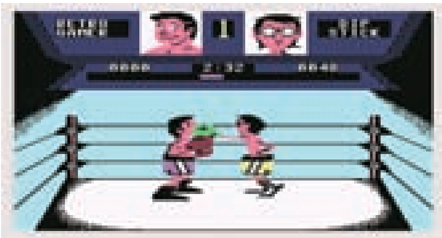


» **Load 59** Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS

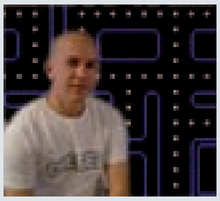






This month we've been chatting to...











"It pathed the way for the RPG landscape that we know today"

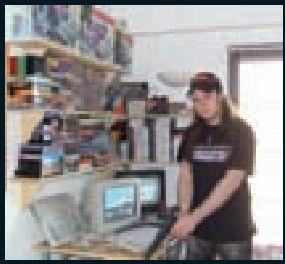
Craig Ritchie



64 THE CLASSIC GAME

We revisit *Baldur's Gate*, the game that gave Dungeons & Dragons a good name again

ESSENTIALS



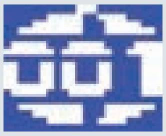
66 TOP 25 ISOMETRIC GAMES

Find out why *Head Over Heels* still has what it takes



RETRO RATED

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



22 PARADROID 90

You'd have probably guessed by the avatar, but reader Paul Kitching explains why he still enjoys this Hewson classic.



96 FREE FALL

Rob Kuczynski is a huge fan of Ian Bell's *Free Fall*. Don't believe us? Then check out his gushing profile for it.



THE BARGAIN OF THE YEAR

RETRO GAMER PRESENTS EMAG LOAD 2

If you're anything like us you probably have access to a fair few issues of Retro Gamer by now. Maybe you keep them in binders, perhaps you use them as makeshift seating for when extra friends come over, or maybe you've laid them on your bedroom floor as slippery (though extremely stylish) tiling.

But what do you do when you need to find a specific article and can't remember if that history of *Donkey Kong* was in issue 51 or 43? Simple. You seek out our latest eMag, which is a compilation that covers issues 31 (that one with the amazing Wil Overton cover) to issue 55 (that one with the amazing David Rowe cover).

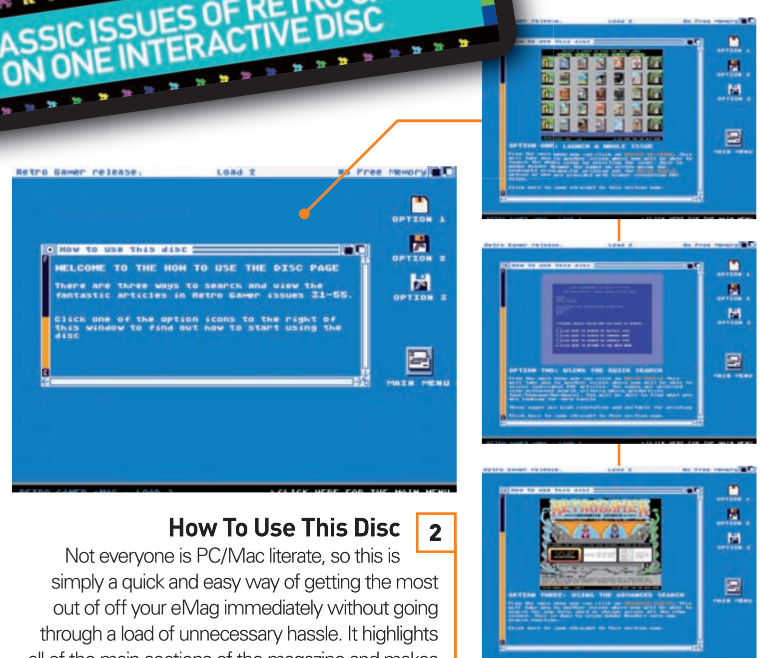
Compatible with both Macs and PCs and extremely user-friendly, it's an absolute doddle to use and is a great alternative to thumbing through two-dozen issues of your favourite retro magazine. Don't just take our word for it though, because we've also included plenty of lovely pictures to gaze at so you get a good idea of what your £19.99 offers you.

Interested in a purchase already? Then head on over to our Imagine Publishing eShop at **www.imagineshop.co.uk.** If you need any further convincing then here's an idea of what you can expect to find inside...



1 **Main Intro**
Upon loading up your eMag you'll be presented with a stylish intro that tells you everything you need to know about Load 2's content. There's even a list of weblinks (including the blog and forum), so if you're online you can head off to our community forum and discuss the content.





How To Use This Disc **2**
Not everyone is PC/Mac literate, so this is simply a quick and easy way of getting the most out of off your eMag immediately without going through a load of unnecessary hassle. It highlights all of the main sections of the magazine and makes navigation an absolute cinch.





Select an Issue 3

Okay this part here is pretty straightforward. All 25 issues are conveniently laid out – so you can once again marvel at those great covers – and all you need to do is select the one you want to read through and you'll be instantly taken to the entire issue via the magic of Adobe Reader.

4 Advanced Search

If you're the sort of person who needs to know every time that we've referenced *Pac-Man* or just want to check that Darran isn't still sneaking mentions of *Strider* into the mag then the Advanced Search is what you need. Type in what you're looking for (while the **RG** overlords look on) and you'll be given a complete and comprehensive list to search through.





Quick Search 5

If you're not looking for a specific game or name then why not just utilise the Quick Search and see what you can discover? You can search via Article, Company or Machine so if you want to see if we've really given the C64 more coverage than the ZX Spectrum you can now find out for certain.

6 Bonus Content

Everybody loves extras, so this second eMag is chock-full. As well as a selection of great desktops to furnish your computer with, there's also the second issue of **games**™'s now out-of-print *Retro Vol 2*. This was originally priced at £9.99 so it's something of a bargain to have it in its entirety here. Best of all though is a section that shows you some of the covers that were put forward, but never made the final cut.





Help & FAQ 7

This part of the eMag is fairly self-explanatory really, but if you do have any questions about our eMag then all the information that you're likely to need can be found in this section.

TO BE THIS GOOD TAKES SEGA

CONTENTS OF MEGA BOX REVEALED


Finally! All three *Streets Of Rage* games on one single disc. Compilations like this are why we still love Sega.

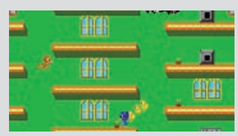
Last month we brought you news that Sega had a brand new compilation due for the PS3 and Xbox 360. This month we can reveal the line-up and, while it's a little predictable, it still makes the Sega fanboy inside us very happy indeed.

Of course, the most exciting news is that the entire *Streets Of Rage* trilogy will be included, as well as usual culprits like *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Altered Beast*, *Bonanza Bros*, *E-Swat* and *Super Thunder Blade*.

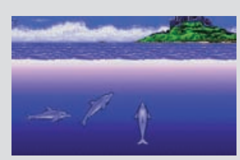
If that wasn't enough, Sega has also revealed that hidden games and extras will also be included as well as Achievements for the Xbox 360 (and hopefully) Trophy support for the PlayStation 3. All we know at the moment is that Master System and original arcade games will be included within the unlockables, so we're hoping that Backbone Entertainment, who worked on the excellent PSP conversion, will include the likes of *Phantasy Star* for the Master System and spot-on arcade conversions of *Space Harrier*, *OutRun*, *Super Hang-On* and *After Burner* (as the Mega Drive versions are all suspiciously absent).

The absence of *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is a bit of a shame (although we're guessing that's due to potential licensing issues thanks to the original Mega Drive game featuring both Spider-Man and Batman), but this is still looking like an excellent collection of games that any owner would be proud to have in their collection.

The full list:



Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle
Alien Storm
Altered Beast
Beyond Oasis
Bonanza Bros
Columns
Comix Zone
Decap Attack Starring Chuck D Head
Dr Robotnik's MBM
Dynamite Headdy
Ecco The Dolphin
Ecco 2: The Tides Of Time
E-Swat
Fatal Labyrinth
Flicky
Gain Ground
Golden Axe I
Golden Axe II
Golden Axe III
Kid Chameleon
Phantasy Star II
Phantasy Star III: Generations Of Doom
Phantasy Star IV: The End Of The Millennium
Ristar
Shining In The Darkness
Shining Force
Shining Force 2
Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master
Sonic 3D Blast
Sonic And Knuckles
Sonic Spinball
Sonic The Hedgehog
Sonic The Hedgehog 2
Sonic The Hedgehog 3
Streets Of Rage
Streets Of Rage 2
Streets Of Rage 3
Super Thunder Blade
Vectorman
Vectorman 2



LAST-MINUTE NEWS



With Midway in danger of going bankrupt, what will become of *Mortal Kombat*?

MIDWAY TO GO BUST?

It's recently been revealed that Midway Games could be facing possible bankruptcy after majority shareholder Sumner Redstone sold his 87 per cent share of the company for just $100,000. As of early December, Midway's share price was a paltry 23 cents (15 pence a share) and many are predicting that the company could face actual bankruptcy sometime in February 2009.

Despite a few misfires in recent years, Midway has been behind some truly classic games including *Ms Pac-Man*, *NBA Jam* and the *Mortal Kombat* franchise. Warner Bros. and Square Enix have apparently shown an interest in some of the publisher's franchises, so the bigger licences may well live on, but this is nevertheless upsetting news, both for fans of the company and those who work there.

FIGHTERS READY

FULL STREET FIGHTER IV ROSTER FINALLY REVEALED?





Ryu proves that he's still not too old to get a damn good kicking from mentor Gouken.

From the many frenzied bouts we've played with Capcom's Leo Tan, *Street Fighter IV* is already shaping up to be the best game in the *Street Fighter* franchise. That's right, we're already suggesting that it's going to be better than *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, and you all know how much we love that.

Anyway, with the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions now only a few short weeks away, we thought you might be interested in the eight new characters joining the 12 that are already playable in the arcade game. Cammy was revealed after she received the most votes in a Capcom US poll and she's joined by fellow *Super Street Fighter II* pal Fei Long (who looks like Bruce Lee). *Street Fight Alpha* fans will no doubt be delighted to hear that Dan, Sakura (already revealed in **RG**) and Gen will also be selectable. But that's not all, the two bosses from the arcade game, Seth and Gouken (Akuma's older brother and mentor of Ryu and Ken) will also join the fray, along with Akuma, who appeared in a later build of the arcade game. All in all then that's a massive 20 characters to choose from.

We're somewhat disappointed that none of the heroes from *Street Fighter III* have made the final cut, but there's always the hope that Capcom will stick some additional characters in at the last minute. If not there's always the option of a patch or downloadable content. Hell, Capcom could release the likes of Hugo and Elena at £10 a pop and we'd still download every single one of them.

FANCY A BYTE?

GET READY FOR A BRAND NEW RETRO EVENT

If you enjoyed last year's Retro Fusion '08 event then prepare for a brand new date to be added to your retro calendar. Byte Back '09 will be taking place on 7 March 2009 at Bidds Live Music Club, Stoke-on-Trent, for two days.

As with Retro Fusion '08 all money collected will be going to charity – in this case either to the RSPCA or The Donna Louise Trust – and organiser Mat Corne is also confident that there will be plenty of guest speakers at the event as well.

"Celebrities already confirmed include Jon Hare, the legendary co-founder of Sensible Software, and Jamie Woodhouse, developer of several Amiga games including *Qwak* for Team17 and *Nitro* for Psygnosis," Mat reveals. "The prolific Spectrum coder Jonathan Cauldwell will be attempting to create a new game in just one day with the help of visitors to the event as well. Other potentials include Nigel Alderton of *Chuckie Egg* fame, Shaun Hollingworth, Bill Harbison and Alex Trowers who was involved in a number of Bullfrog games."

That's a pretty solid list of retro gaming celebrities for a first-time event and while Mat Corne is more than happy with the way everything is coming together he admits that planning the event certainly hasn't been an easy task.

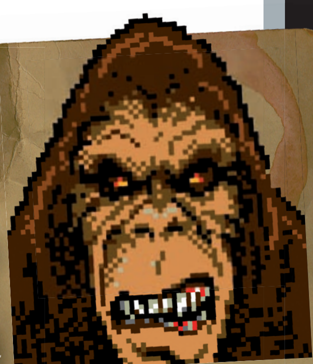
"The most difficult thing to sort out was a suitable venue that didn't want to charge the earth for hosting the event," begins Mat. "Once I found Bidds and announced the event the rest fell into place quite quickly. That said, I couldn't have organised the event without the help and support of the retro gaming community, who have offered to set up a variety of stands and provide all manner of interesting hardware for guests to play on once they're there."

Mat's convinced that all the hard work is definitely going to be worth it though and the two-day event is not only reasonably priced, at £12 for adults, £5 for juniors (under 16s) and free for children under 10, but it also promises to be a hell of a lot of fun. Expect more news next month.



If Bullfrog's Alex Trowers does turn up, will he be rocking out again like he did at Retro Fusion '08?

HERO OF THE MONTH



GEORGE

HERO OF THE MONTH

Every month, **Retro Gamer** looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *Rampage*'s George.

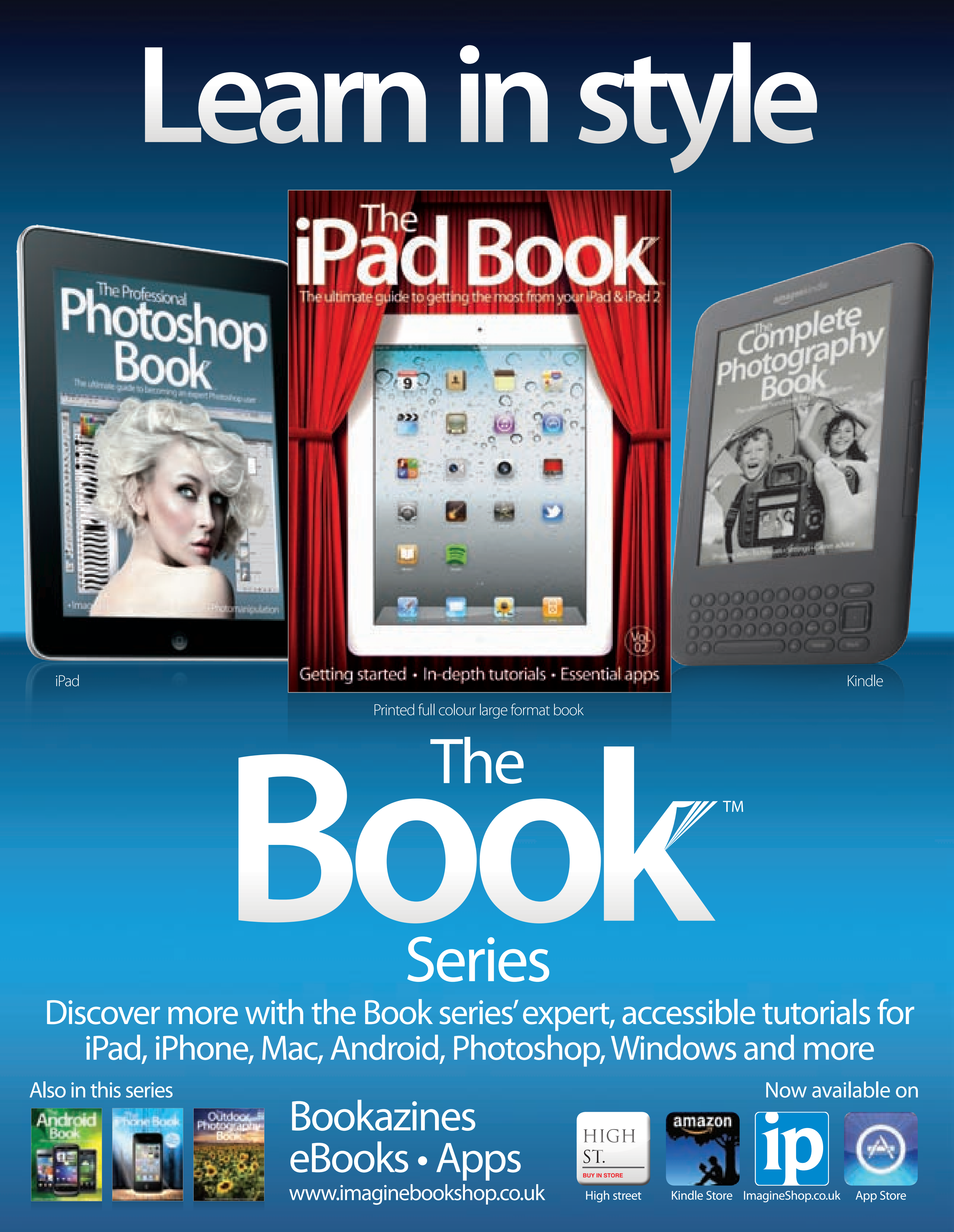
First appearance: *Rampage*

Weapon of choice: Big smashing fists

Most likely to: Get mistaken for Donkey Kong

Least likely to: Appear in any future remakes of *King Kong*

Unusual fact: George the gorilla actually started off life as a human, but toxic waste caused him to mutate.


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Retro Gamer Diary

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING Retro Gamer
IF YOU WANT **RETRO GAMER** TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past doesn't mean there aren't plenty of games and events to look forward to. Every month we list all the exciting games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



JANUARY

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL

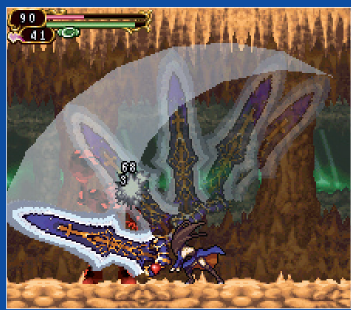
Released: 30 January

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

No Stefan this month, so we've had to close our eyes and just imagine how good this latest *House Of The Dead* is going to be. Fortunately, our imaginations are pretty vivid, so we've set high standards for Sega's latest lightgun game. Only a little while longer to wait and we'll discover if it's as good as we're expecting. We have faith in you, Sega.



FEBRUARY

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

Released: 6 February

Publisher: Konami

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Talk about saving the best till last. It's been a lengthy wait, but we can safely confirm that *Order of Ecclesia* is the best handheld *Castlevania* that we've ever played. Beautifully structured and with some truly astounding (and challenging) bosses, it's a great return to form that nearly rivals the outstanding *Symphony of the Night*. Amazing scenes.



FEBRUARY

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT

Released: 6 February

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

We really enjoyed *Sonic And The Secret Rings*, so we're more than a little intrigued about the next game in the series. We're not too sure if having access to a giant sword is that good an idea, after all, Sonic hasn't exactly been true to his roots over the last few years, but it should prove a handy weapon if Shadow decides to show his ugly face.



FEBRUARY

CHRONO TRIGGER

Released: 6 February

Publisher: Square Enix

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Final Fantasy III and *IV* were great updates for the DS, so we can't wait to see what Square Enix achieves with *Chrono Trigger*. One of Square's and the SNES's best RPGs, this update features similar 2D sprites, but will utilise the DS's touch and dual screens to create a new experience. Add the cut-scenes from the PlayStation upgrade and the end result is another killer update from Square Enix.



FEBRUARY

BIONIC COMMANDO

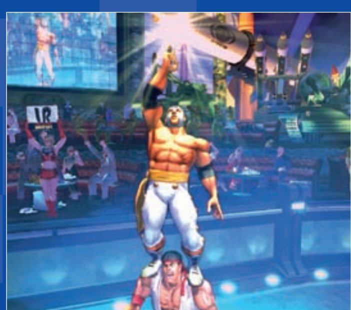
Released: 13 February

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £34.99-£49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

We'll admit to being rather excited about *Bionic Commando* now. GRIN might not be that well known a name within the industry, but we were very impressed with its Xbox Live Arcade offering *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*. Seemingly based on the *Lost Planet* engine, this already looks like it's captured the spirit of the NES original, even if the viewpoint is completely new. Now everyone buy it so that Capcom makes a new *Strider*.



FEBRUARY

STREET FIGHTER IV

Released: 20 February

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £39.99-£49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

Well we've been playing a little more of the home consoles versions now and let us just tell you that *Street Fighter IV* is amazing. While Darran is still weeping tears - and no one wants to see a fat man weep - over the omission of *Third Strike* pugilists Hugo and Elena, he's become rather adept at using Zangief. Indeed, so impressed has he become that it's not strange to see him disappear to the games room for hours on end.



MARCH

GAUNTLET

Released: 7 March

Publisher: Eidos

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Another DS game slips to next year. Like *Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia* we've been really enjoying *Gauntlet*, so it saddens us that Backbone Entertainment's game has suffered such a big delay. Maybe, it's so it can include arcade-perfect ports of the original games, but it's probably just to ensure that it doesn't get lost in the Christmas rush. Regardless, it's definitely a title to keep your eye on.



MARCH

POPULOUS

Released: 27 March

Publisher: Rising Star Games

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Considering Electronic Arts owns the rights to *Populous*, it's somewhat worrying that it's not publishing one of its own games. While we've not played the Japanese version, many reviews suggested that it suffered from the same issues – fiddly control, cramped playing area – that befell the original *SimCity DS* release. Hopefully these issues won't appear once the UK version finally arrives. Time to cross those fingers.


It's a jungle out there.
Swing through it
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Your guide to the best applications for iPhone & iPod touch
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HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



» **Is it worth adding a spinner for *Arkanoid*? The simple and correct answer is yes – plenty of great games use one.**

SHORT AND SWEET

Dear Retro Gamer,

So… last night I was sitting at home trying to decide on the restoration of my arcade cab (should I make all of the buttons illuminated or only the 1 Player/2 Players start buttons? Is it worth adding a spinner just for *Arkanoid*? And so on) and my mind drifted back (ooh, don't we all do that?)…

My love for bits started back in 1984 with a 464. It was upgraded to passion with a 6128 in 1988 and switched to gigolo status (that is, giving in to bigger 16-bit machines for the luxury of it) when I sold myself to a 1040STFM in 1990. In 1993, I gave it away to prepare for my university entrance exams and two years later (yeah, first effort was not a complete success) I found myself with a brand spanking new 486DX4@100. And in 1996, my love for retro started taking shape.

Sure, I had toyed around with a ZX emu on the ST but it was more of a curio. But the PC – it opened up new avenues of linking to a past that was abruptly interrupted, when I discovered PCST, or PaCifiST. Created by Frederic Gidouin, this was an exceptional and serious Atari ST emulator that got the ball rolling – at least for me. Oh, the hours I spent at the university lab downloading all the disk images I could find (those were 33.5Kbp/s days at home) and transferring them to an external, 120MB LS Superdisk drive… Oh, the joys, as I rediscovered the games I was forced to give up, and then discovered titles I had never laid my hands on. I still remember the day – 12 years ago but still feels like yesterday – when I was on the bus back home reading the dot-matrix-printed documentation and having to deal with VBE modes, SET BLASTER, TOS images and write-delayed disk caching. Amazing, pioneering days.

Those were the days when retro computing was very niche, geeky and nerdy, before the world and its dog jumped on to the wagon. When companies considered it just illegal, and before our illegal practices and persistence forced them to open their eyes and give us all those wonderful products we're seeing today. Before emulating things was easy, and when you had to hunt down every single disk image – or dump them yourself if you were lucky enough to have the original hardware.

So, I was wondering, how and when did other people get into retro gaming in a serious way? What do you think of it now, and how does it feel? For me, those days of 1996 are almost of equal importance as the original experiences themselves – am I too weird?

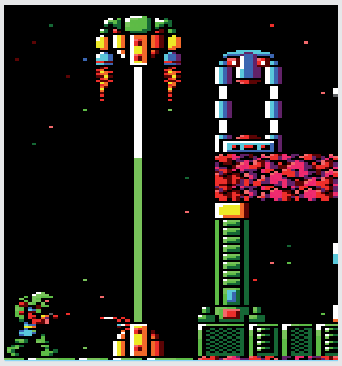
As I was writing this I googled PaCifiST and downloaded it again. Strangely meta-retro, I'm



» **If you like HD and *Street Fighter II*, you should make this your next investment – a great way to pass the time until the release of *Street Fighter IV*.**

STAR LETTER

SUPPLELY PUT



Dear Retro Gamer,

Hello there! I would like to make a request for a supplement to be included in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**: a compilation of all *Jetman* comic pages that appeared in the *Crash* magazine. You could ask Oliver Frey to paint the first ones, like he did the last ones, and you could also ask John Richardson to draw a conclusion to the whole series (I never read the last issues of *Crash*, so I don't know whether there already is a conclusion). I think this would be a neat supplement to your magazine.

By the way, since I'm writing to you, I'd also like to ask for a Developer Lookback of Gargoyle Games and a Desert Island Disks with Raffaele Cecco. I like the new changes you're introducing to the magazine, but I still don't like the Retro Revival pages having only one huge screenshot. I think several smaller ones spread over both pages with a bit of blank space would give us a better impression of the game in question.

Thanks for reading my letter!

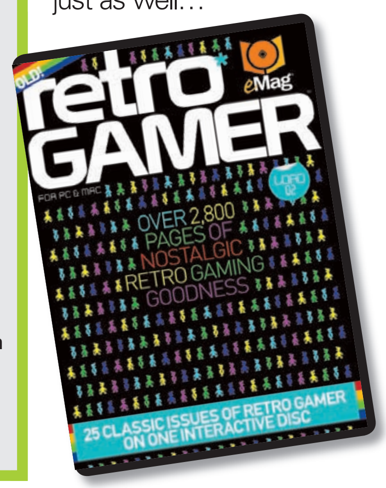
Kind regards,

Rui Cuco, via email

Sadly, Rui, it's very unlikely that we'd ever run a supplement inside Retro Gamer, such a thing would no doubt incur additional costs and almost certainly draw our time away from the magazine, which we certainly wouldn't want to do. However, we did like your suggestions for future Developer Lookback and Desert Island Disk features. We've actually been trying to get Raffaele to speak to us for some time, but he's very busy at the moment. We will get him though... With regards to the look of the Retro Revival pages, the magazine is currently going through a gradual redesign at the moment so expect to see some tweaks over the next few issues.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag: Retro Gamer Load 2, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something Strider related will go down just as well…





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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Next month: Jon Hare



BURNING QUESTION?

HAVE YOU ever had a burning question that you've always wanted to ask? Do you often sit at your computer desk wondering if David Braben will ever patch things up with Ian Bell or if Matthew Smith checks into hotels as Miner Willy? If you do then head on over to our forums where you can put your burning questions to whoever we're interviewing. The best questions will then get answered and revealed in the next issue. Visit the forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

going to run an early emulator just for the fun of the emulator itself… *sigh*

Regards,

Themis, via email

A great letter. From a less technical standpoint, for us it has always been about the nostalgia and the quality of the games. Because great games are timeless, classic games never really left us. It's encouraging for us to see retro gaming grow in popularity, and to see developers finally catch on to the curio we all love. This growth has almost certainly been stimulated by services such as Xbox Live and Virtual Console, which allow developers a quick, easy and relatively inexpensive method to create a growing library of retro titles and develop new in-house retro homebrew projects. And even if new games, such as *Bionic Commando Rearmed* and *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*, are simply seen as clever devices to generate interest in an IP before its forthcoming next-gen releases, if the quality and respect of the franchise is there, which in both aforementioned titles it is, then the future for retro gaming (as ironic as it sounds) looks promising.



Stuart wants to see more classic sprite-based projects appear, but Darran's mad deep in love with HD re-imagining.

> "Xbox Live and Virtual Console allow developers a quick, easy and relatively inexpensive method to create a growing library of retro titles"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Shane Smith
Joined:	27th Oct 2008
Location:	Perth, Australia
Occupation:	Graphic Designer
Website:	Not given
Fav Games System:	Arcade
Bio:	Been a huge gamer since my big brother gave me his Atari 2600 when i was about 6ish. Since then I built my own dream arcade machine and buy heaps of old skool games from my local markets.

SAME OLD, SAME OLD

Dear Retro Gamer,

Each month I read the letters from readers complaining that there is too much of this, too little of that and that their definition of retro is 'X'. I read the magazine, almost, from cover to cover. I love reading about the games I've known and loved, as well as learning about games I've never even heard of before. Your magazine is the complete package for a retro enthusiast.

Keep up the good work,

Mal, via email

We agree, Mal, sometimes working on a retro magazine can be a blessing and a curse. We do our utmost to ensure that balance and variety finds its way into the magazine each month, so it does upset us when we hear that some readers feel that a certain issue feels weak because the features or games covered don't instantly grab them. We really do value, and try to respond, to all the feedback that we receive via emails and across our forums. Without trying to be preachy, for us, our goal has always been to turn out a magazine that is both entertaining and informative to ensure Retro Gamer is the best magazine it can be.

AMIGA QUANDARY

Dear Retro Gamer,

Could you please let me know if there are any shops in the UK that still stock Commodore Amiga games? I have an A500 Plus and I

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? Then see if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite games

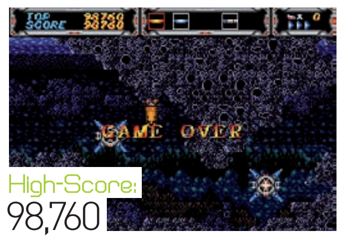


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: THUNDER FORCE III

Why I picked it: Playing *Thunder Force VI* made me realise how much I love *Thunder Force III*.

Handy advice: Make use of all of your weapons.



High-Score: 98,760

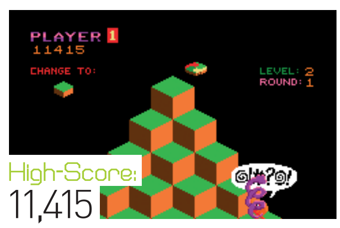


STUART

CHOSEN GAME: Q*BERT

Why I picked it: I've been hooked silly since bashing out our Top 25 Isometric Games feature.

Handy advice: Try to time your jumps with the enemies, and don't be greedy!



High-Score: 11,415

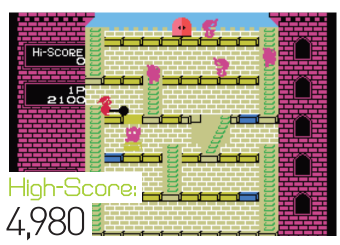


ASH

CHOSEN GAME: MR. DO! VS UNICORNS

Why I picked it: Because *Mr. Do!* is cool and the MSX version is even cooler. Plus it was conveniently near by.

Handy Advice: Lay traps for the unicorns by knocking holes in the ground, then climb above them and drop a tile on their head.



High-Score: 4,980

From the Forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What is your favourite isometric game?

Retrogarden *Civilization II*. An update on a timeless classic, great music, but most importantly – you could play as the Welsh (as part of the Celts, anyway).

Oli_Lar *Viewpoint*. Oh, the graphics! Damn the difficulty of it though.

Antiriad2097 For sheer technical achievement, it's currently *Space 1999* on the Oric.

Djcarlos *Crystal Castles*... the great game, not the b*****ks band. Can you have an isometric band?

Smurph Ooh, so many great examples to choose from. Personal faves: *Viewpoint* (Neo-Geo), much better than *Zaxxon* in my opinion, but by Zombie Jeebus its knuckle-bitingly hard; *Head Over Heels*, I was terrible at it but loved it so much; and *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Vandal Hearts*. My love for the fantasy style strategy games comes from these.

kelp7 I think it has to be *Alien 8* on the BBC, loved the animation of that cranky old robot waddling around the sci-fi environment.

Dunjohn *Super Mario RPG*! Platforming bits are the bane of any isometric game, and this thankfully kept them to a minimum.

Ian Smith *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* on the NES. Great gameplay, great music and an excellent two-player option.

Bolda *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* (PC) – the best train set in the world!

Markopoloman *Entombed* on the Commodore 64, if that counts as isometric?! Closely followed by *Fairlight*, also on the Commodore 64.

Forestville *UFO: Enemy Unknown* on the Amiga, for the turn-based strategy, the cool graphics and the long and absorbing gameplay that continuously went on into the early hours.

Golgo13 *Movie* on the Spectrum – it was odd and I didn't have a clue what I was doing but I played it for ages.

Andrew Rollings Do yourself a favour and google *Hamsterball*. My favourite isometric game? Difficult question. The one I played the most is probably *X-COM: Enemy Unknown*, but I also have a soft spot for *Ant Attack*. For sheer 'blow me away' goodness, it's *Knight Lore*.

The Master Did *Marble Madness* come out before *OutRun*? I seem to have fond memories of it being the very first arcade game where I almost creamed my pants to the soundtrack. I used to hum it obsessionally, as you do. You know the track, the one after the rubbish easy stage. The one where the *black ball* first appears! *KRANG*

Sleeper77 *D/Generation*, which was the reason why I bought another CD32 after selling mine all those years previously. Emulation was simply not enough, I had to have the original and the console to play it on.

Thl The Sega Master System conversion of *Enduro Racer*. It gave me an opportunity to turn it into a stunt course, unless you're the legendary Evil Knievel.

JetSetWilly Why do you make me choose? Oh... alright, then. I suppose *Viewpoint*. Being the descendant of *Zaxxon*, it ramped up the graphics, the sound and kept the core element that made *Zaxxon* fun: the gameplay; and my god, was it awesome.

Timothy Lumsden I think it has to be *Knight Lore* and the rest of the filmation Ultimate games – they really put isometric games on the map – the school playground was literally all a quiver when we first saw this as kids.

Rupert *Putt & Putter* for the SMS! I used to rent it from the video shop all the time. I remember when they were getting in PlayStation stuff and selling all the Mega Drive and Master System games, I bought it for £7 and it's the one that's still sitting in my collection now with the video rental stickers on. Perhaps one of my most sentimentally prized possessions.

Boyo I'd say *Tornado Low Level* and *Cyclone*. I loved *Hydrofool* as well, but maybe the chirpy 128K music on that game makes it more special than it really is.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE!

CASSETTE GAMES

Havantgottaclue: Most retro dealers on eBay seem happy if they can make 99p on a single cassette game. So, to my great surprise, two copies of *Gryzor* for the CPC went for £34 and £23 each – the first an original Ocean copy, the second a Hit Squad re-release.

Chinnico: It's not about the tape, the disk or if the magnetic track it's recorded on is still readable; it's the item as a whole. That evokes memory and feelings of a time of which I am still very fond of.

sirclive1: I've paid over £20 plenty of times just to get hold of a rare Spectrum game and loaned them to the WOS site for preservation.

Shinobi: The most I paid for a tape was for the Commodore 64. It was around £15 with P+P for the *Last Ninja 2* boxset. It had a ninja mask and star with it. I now see it go for over £30.

Seadog74: Some of the original Amsoft titles will easily fetch more than a tenner each, if it is a trusted seller and the game has been tested. I would probably pay around a tenner if it means something to me, good memories and all that.

SONIC

James Bond: For me the best *Sonic* is between the Mega Drive versions of *Sonic 1* and *2*. *Sonic Adventure* would come in a close third.

Playgeneration: *Sonic 2* on the MD is the pinnacle of the series for me, followed by *Sonic 1* on the Master System, and I loved *Sonic Adventure* when it came out on Dreamcast.

Elmosexwhistle: I absolutely adore the soundtrack to *Sonic 1*, so that would get my vote.

Sureshot: I went with *Sonic 1* (Mega Drive). Probably my most played out of any of them and made one Christmas simply awesome.

Elgin_McQueen: Hmmm, I was playing *Sonic 2* (Master System) yesterday. There's something about that first zone that doesn't seem right, think it's the lack of enemies, just not as fun as Green Hill Zone.

Fred83: *Sonic CD* for me. I loved all the other *Sonics*, but they were just too damn short, that is until *Sonic CD* came out

CHARITY SHOPS

pottyboy: Popped into Cancer Research UK in Walton-on-Thames today and bought a C64 Plug 'n' Play for £2! Box was a bit tatty, but it works great! Just had a good blast on it for an hour or so, and IMO it's a great device.

Witchfinder: I've never found anything decent games-wise in a charity shop. It's always just a load of *FIFA 99*s on the PSone for me.

DPrinny: I can't remember most of the stuff I've got from charity shops, but here's the most recent: *Dark Savior* (Saturn), *Sega Rally* (Saturn), *Daytona CCE* (Saturn) and a Saturn pad. The whole lot for a fiver.

JetSetWilly: The last time I got anything good out of a charity shop was *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, *Wave Race 64*, *Contra III* (US), *Dino City* (US and it's crap), *The Addams Family* and *Blast Corps* for 99p each and *Emperor: Battle For Dune* for PC for £1.50. But that was bloody ages ago.

Old Vs NEW

Each month we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their current-gen successors. This month we pit OutRun against OutRun 2006...

OutRun



OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast



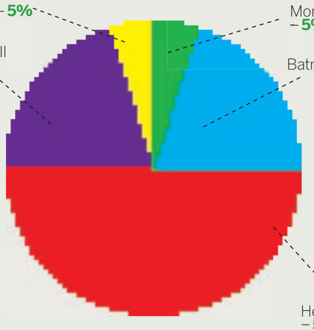
32% | 68%

Jdanddiet Original! Such memories

Rinoa_ I love both, but 2006 gets my vote

HOT TOPIC

What's your favourite Jon Ritman game? You'll have to go to our Top 25 Isometric Games feature on page 66 to find out ours.



"Another vote for Batman. Head Over Heels is just too weird, it hurts my little mind" **– Pforson**

"Match Day II for me, so much better than the very good Emlyn Hughes" **– sirclive1**



can't use it. If you know of any shops that still stock games, machines or accessories I'd be grateful if you could let me know.

Regards,

Edward, Hertfordshire

To be honest, Edward, your best bet is to either browse your local charity shops, scour eBay or register on the Lemon Amiga forums. The latter has an excellent trade section, and its members are always friendly and helpful, too.

CLEARLY AN OLI FAN

Dear Retro Gamer,

I'm a long-time subscriber and a massive fan of **Retro Gamer**. It is one, if not the only, magazine out today that's as well written and informative as the magazines of old. The highlight of every month is having the latest issue land on my doormat.

Anyway, I just wanted to drop you guys a line to say keep up the brilliant work, and also to thank you for the excellent Oli Frey Christmas cover. It took me right back to my childhood again, when I used to read the excellent *Crash* and would pore over the reviews. It was a wonderful surprise. And one that brings me to the real point of my writing to you: is there any chance we might be able to see more new Oli artwork appear in the pages of my favourite magazine? If the answer's not a resounding 'yes' then don't bother printing my letter (only joking guys).

Graham, London

We were over the moon when Oliver Frey finally agreed to work on a new cover for Retro Gamer's Christmas issue. Being huge fans of his work, it was a tremendous privilege for us, especially since he was also redoing a classic *Crash* cover. We have been in touch with Oli and you'll be pleased to hear that he said he would be happy to illustrate more covers for us in the future. So all we can really say is watch that space… at the very front of the magazine that is.



Darran loves his shmups but he also finds time to play through the latest titles as well.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

To HD or not to HD, that is the question

This month, Darran and Stu have been talking about the new *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*. Darran loves the look of the game and wants to see more retro games get the high-definition treatment, while Stuart, although equally impressed with the game, would like to see more of what Capcom did with *Mega Man 9* and go on to release more authentic looking retro games. So, who are you siding with? Head on over to www.retrogamer.net and let us know.

DARRAN DOES A 360

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was reading through last month's issue and noticed that both Stuart Hunt and Ashley Day appear to enjoy playing new games when they're not at work, while Darran appears to stick to the classics (he's been playing *Defender*). Does he really love retro gaming and shoot-'em-ups that much or does he enjoy playing new games as well?

James Brundell, Somerset

Good question, James. Darran has an Xbox 360 collection (and a PS3 collection, for that matter) that would make most gamers – old and new – weep with envy (well, that's what he tells us anyway). He's currently enjoying *Fable II*, *Mirror's Edge* and the rather excellent remake of *Duke Nukem 3D*. He does love his old-school shooters though and insists that the reason he's always playing them at work is for research purposes and not because he's a lazy git.

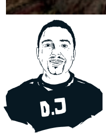
> "Darran has a 360 collection that would make most gamers weep with envy"

CURRENTLY PLAYING









DARRAN

Alien Crush Returns

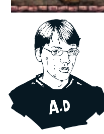
It's not perfect by any means, but I still can't stop playing Hudson's remake of the classic PC-Engine game. It's certainly lacking in special effects, but there's something charming about hitting aliens in the face with steel balls.



STUART

Rock Band 2

I've been dazzling my neighbours with *Rock Band 2* I love the new way you can unlock songs, but where the hell is *You Shook Me All Night Long* by AC/DC and *The Boxer* by Simon & Garfunkel, Harmonix?



ASH

Castlevania: Order Of Ecclesia

Some say the handheld *Castlevania* games are getting a bit tired now but I'm still not bored of them. This one has a really interesting structure and some stunning boss battles. And it's kept me amused for hours.

retro GAMER

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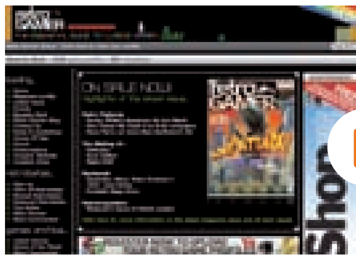
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When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier, as all you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's been on the hunt for isometric classics.



Head on over to the excellent **retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php.



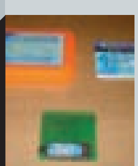
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

EBAY BARGAINS

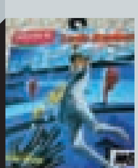
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site, to find the best bargains out there…



■ Darran almost placed a bid on this item, a rare (boxed) promo card of *Alpine Games* on the Atari Lynx. It was going for £23.06.



■ This Game & Watch from Thailand was going for $167.80 with minutes left. Not surprising as it's one of the first G&W games to find a release.



■ We were going mad playing games on our MSX this month, so much so that we were tempted by this Japanese copy of *Lode Runner* for £43.50.



■ If you like the thought of playing anime cartoons at home, and have a cool £145 burning a hole in your bank account, then this PC-FX is for you.

3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ACORN ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)



COMMODORE

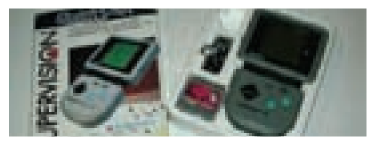
AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)

FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)



MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

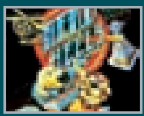
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

NEC

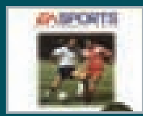
PC-6###	£10+ ($18+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

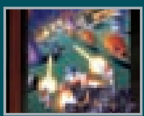
Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest (hardware or software) that have caught our eyes. This month we've been looking for isometric games…



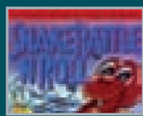
HEAD OVER HEELS
System: **Spectrum**
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **£4.40**



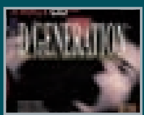
FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
System: **Mega Drive**
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **£1.89**



VIEWPOINT
System: **Neo-Geo**
Normally sells for **£90**
Ended at **£62**



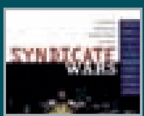
SNAKE RATTLE 'N' ROLL
System: **NES**
Normally sells for **£4**
Ended at **£5.64**



D/GENERATION
System: **Amiga CD32**
Normally sells for **£12**
Ended at **£8.85**



BAT MAN
System: **Amstrad**
Normally sells for **£2**
Ended at **£3.12**



SYNDICATE WARS
System: **PC**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£3.20**



ENDURO RACER
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **£2.99**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



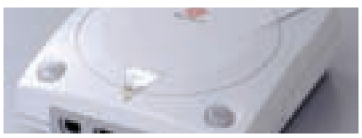
PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**

VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH, WE SPEAK TO AMSTRAD MAD AL WHITE ABOUT HIS IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF AMSTRAD MACHINES, GAMES AND MAGAZINES



» I'm Al White and this is my Amstrad collection! I'll soon be launching www.gx4000.co.uk dedicated to the Amstrad console.



» Here are some of my favourite and rarest games. Some of the rarest disks include the special Gold Edition of *Elite*, *Prehistorik 2* (the last-ever full-price release, stunning graphics), *Lemmings*, *Prince Of Persia*, *Blues Brothers* (big box) and *Rainbow Islands*.



» Here are the machines. They're well designed, great looking and a real joy to use, especially as the unit goes straight into the monitor and you only need one plug!



» *Amstrad Action* was the longest-running publication, starting in October 1985 and lasting 117 issues till June 1995! One of the proudest parts of my collection!



» Naughty! Bootleg Amstrad cartridges! I already own all the games on tape or disk, but I had some of these specially made and its great to just slap in the cart and boot straight into a game of *Gryzor* or *Chase H.Q.*!



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about then contact us at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1985

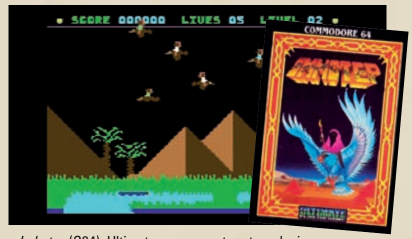
OCTOBER 1985 – Daley's back with Supertest, blood and bore with Friday The 13th, Ultimate's Imhotep rises, a third Willy and no taxman, bye to HCW, Mastertronic go MAD and The Goonies arrive. Richard Burton finds a map and goes off to do a truffle shuffle…



» *Friday The 13th* (Spectrum): Advertised as a 'computer nasty', *Friday The 13th* was, but for all the wrong reasons.



» *Nodes Of Yesod* (C64): Odin tried to copy Ultimate's graphical style. The end product was comparable and a great game.



» *Imhotep* (C64): Ultimate was a master at producing atmospheric and engaging games. This wasn't one of them…

With Christmas skulking around the corner with intent, software houses were readying their big guns and they didn't come much bigger than the compilation from The Hit Squad entitled *They Sold A Million*, due to appear on C64, Amstrad and Spectrum for £9.95.

The compilation would include *Jet Set Willy*, *Beach Head*, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* and *Sabre Wulf* on the Spectrum and Amstrad, while C64 owners got *The Staff Of Karnath* instead of *Sabre Wulf*.

Ocean revealed that its follow-up to the enormously successful *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* would be available by the end of the month. *Daley Thompson's Supertest* would follow the same bicep-breaking, keyboard-splintering, joystick-knackering formula with a range of eight new sports, including tug of war, rowing and cycling.

It was certainly a month for licensing tie-ins with software houses big and small throwing their budget at obtaining the gaming rights to the next big thing.



» *They Sold A Million* (Spectrum): Two versions of the compilation were intended for the Spectrum, although, disappointingly, *Atic Atac* was eventually dropped.

CRL announced it would be releasing its interpretation of the classic movie *Blade Runner* on Commodore 64 with a Spectrum and Amstrad conversion to follow. Driving your skimmer around the streets and hunting down replicants sounds like fun but, the game turned out to be very average indeed.

US Gold announced it had splurged out on *The Goonies* licence, based on a forthcoming movie by Steven Spielberg. The puzzle-based adventure was already under development and due out within the month, with it destined to be a cross-format hit. The movie turned out to be pretty decent, too…

Another game-of-the-film under development was *Friday The 13th* by Domark. It was being touted as a 'computer nasty' given the knife-wielding blood fest the movies were. If nothing else, Domark got that part spot-on. Computer nasty barely began to justify quite why this pile of guff ever got released in the first place. Only the Commodore 64 version managed to scrape any hint of credibility for being a piece of entertainment. CPC and Spectrum owners weren't so lucky.

What made it doubly worse was that the hype for the game was building steadily with some provocative advertising. The bloody adverts created the desired effect – plenty of news coverage and sales.



» *Sorcery+* (Amstrad): Doubly shocking – a superb Amsoft game and an Amstrad original. Finally, a game to showcase the CPC.

Ultimate, who usually refrained from such advertising shenanigans, preferring to let its games do the talking, announced the imminent release of *Imhotep*, the company's latest C64 offering. The advert contained Ultimate's usual mesmerising mystical artwork, but the game was the complete polar opposite – dull, hard and uninspiring.

Small software company, Orpheus Software, was also celebrating a licensing agreement, albeit one a little more downbeat from the usual Hollywood blockbuster material.

A game based on the anarchic waywardness of the BBC's *The Young Ones* comedy would be coming soon to a Commodore 64, Spectrum and Amstrad near you. Unfortunately, the menu-driven, split-screen arcade adventure turned out to be a complete downer, man.

Mastertronic announced it would be offering a range of games on a new sub-label. Mastertronic Added Dimension, MAD for short, would release titles for the increased price of £2.99 and would feature games purported to be more advanced than its standard £1.99 range.



» *The Goonies* (C64): A good platform puzzler of a game which kept the feel-good factor and atmosphere of the movie.

1985

OCTOBER NEWS

On 7 October four members of the Palestinian Liberation Front hijacked the Achille Lauro, an Italian cruise ship, off the coast of Egypt. They demanded that 50 Palestinian prisoners be freed from Israeli prisons or they would blow up the liner, which had over 400 crew and passengers on board.

After a three-day stand-off, the hijackers were given free passage, for the safe return of the hostages, although one hostage was killed.

An airliner was to take the hijackers from Egypt to Tunisia, but was intercepted by US fighters and forced to land in Italy where the hijackers were arrested.

On 2 October, actor Rock Hudson died of an AIDS-related illness at the age of 59. He was most famously nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the 1957 Academy Awards for his role in the movie *Giant*, which also starred James Dean in his final movie role.

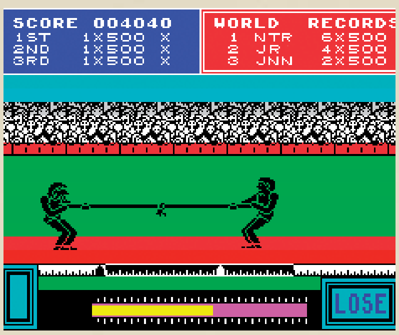
On 10 October, Orson Welles, another cinematic legend, passed away at the age of 70. As well as the influential and critically acclaimed *Citizen Kane*, Welles also graced such motion-picture classics as *Transformers: The Movie* and *The Muppet Movie*.



» The cruise ship Achille Lauro; boarded by Palestinians who initially demanded better shuffleboard facilities…



» Orson Welles died this month but among his finest cinematic moments was an appearance in *The Muppet Movie*. Now that's quality.



» *Daley Thompson's Supertest* (Spectrum): Daley's back to break you and your joystick. Getting tugging in the final event…

The first batch of titles ready for release this month included *The Last V8* and *Spellbound*, an arcade adventure by David Jones, the programmer behind Mastertronic's £1.99 classic *Finders Keepers*. Indeed, it would also star the Magic Knight and would prove to be just as big a hit as its predecessor.

Jet Set Willy, Matthew Smith and Software Projects were again in the news with the company revealing that the Miner Willy game, *Willy Meets The Taxman*, would be ready for release in January on Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad. Don't hold your breath for that one…

Another sequel that was almost ready for release was *Who Dares Wins II* by Alligata Software. Oddly, the original *Who Dares Wins* had still not got within a grenade's throw of a shop as the game was deemed too similar to the licensed Capcom arcade hit, *Commando*, being converted by Elite Systems, resulting in an ongoing copyright infringement court case.

The ongoing sales battle of weekly computer magazines came to an end when *Home Computing Weekly* was bought from owner Argus Press by Scot Press, publisher of *Popular Computing Weekly*.

Amstrad Action, a new Amstrad-dedicated magazine, gave its highest honour, the Mastergame, to *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* (Melbourne House) with its lesser award, the AA Rave, going to *Boulder Dash* (Mirrorsoft/First Star), *Cyrus II Chess* (Amsoft), *Lords Of Midnight* (Beyond/Amsoft), *Nonterraqueous* (Mastertronic), *Sorcery+* (Virgin/Amsoft), *Everyone's A Wally* (Mikro-Gen) and *Dun Darach* (Gargoyle Games).

For Spectrum owners, *Crash* was Smashing just three games this month; *Night Shade* (Ultimate), *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* (Melbourne House) and *The Touchstones Of Rhiannon* (Adventure International).

Newsfield's sister mag, *Zzap!64*, handed out its freshly squeezed Sizzlers to *Monty On The Run* (Gremlin Graphics), *Racing Destruction Set* (Ariolasoft/Electronic Arts), *Pinball Construction Set* (Ariolasoft), *Nodes Of Yesod* (Odin Computer Graphics), *Barry McGuigan's World Championship Boxing* (Activision) and *Spy Vs Spy II* (Beyond/First Star).



» *Who Dares Wins II* (Amstrad): If you think this looks like *Commando* you should've seen the original.

THIS MONTH IN…



AMSTRAD ACTION

With a host of software reviews, including over 130 bite-sized reviews of older games, the debut issue proved to be invaluable as reference material for new CPC owners wanting impartial gaming feedback. *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* was its first-ever review and also gained the first Mastergame award.

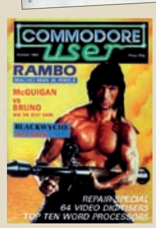




SINCLAIR USER

Sinclair User ran an article on the pitfalls of setting up your own mail-order software house. It featured the tale of Asvoguelle Productions, a one-man business trying to sell his game, *Mount Challenge*. After booking adverts and getting the game reviewed in *Crash*, he managed to shift just six copies. Ouch.





COMMODORE USER

Commodore User reviewed and compared two recent releases: *Barry McGuigan's World Championship Boxing* and *Frank Bruno's Boxing*. Both rated well, both played well but Big Frank's *Punch-Out!*-style game just edged it on points in the final ratings. Don't tell Barry, he'll punch your teeth out…



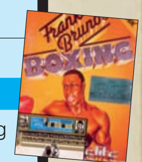
CHARTS

OCTOBER 1985



MUSIC

1. The Power Of Love (Jennifer Rush)
2. If I Was (Midge Ure)
3. Trapped (Colonel Abrams)
4. Lean On Me (Red Box)
5. Rebel Yell (Billy Idol)



SPECTRUM

1. Frank Bruno's Boxing (Elite)
2. Hyper Sports (Imagine)
3. Softaid (Various)
4. Dynamite Dan (Mirrorsoft)
5. Spy Vs Spy (Beyond)



COMMODORE 64

1. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Melbourne House)
2. Hyper Sports (Imagine)
3. Elite (Firebird)
4. Softaid (Various)
5. Action Biker (Mastertronic)

AMSTRAD

1. The Way Of The Exploding Fist (Melbourne House)
2. Beach Head (US Gold/Access)
3. Alien 8 (Ultimate)
4. Dun Darach (Gargoyle Games)
5. Finders Keepers (Mastertronic)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1991



JUNE 1991 – Barbarian 3 planned/canned, C65 planned/canned, Atari's Panther just canned, Indiana Jones goes fourth, Boulder Dash consoles itself and super Sonic on the Spectrum. Richard Burton dons his shades in preparation for a colour-clash spectacular…



» Although the Mega-CD never really flourished outside of Japan, some good games did appear on it, *Sonic CD* for one…

Storm Software, creator of *SWIV* and *Rod-Land*, revealed this month it was busy on the development of the third instalment of the *Barbarian* series. Featuring hack-and-slash action, beheadings and Maria Whittaker, the previous two incarnations of the game both sold extremely well.

Would the third prove as successful? We didn't get to find out as the game never got further than the planning stages. That said, the development paperwork is being pored over and scrutinised as we speak…

Commodore had been busy with new system developments and price restructuring of existing machines. The new machine, the C65, was somewhat of a strange beast. With 8-bit micros coming to the end of their natural shelf life, Commodore's plan to release a new 8-bit computer that bridged the gap between C64 and Amiga was seen as surprising.

It would've featured an internal 3.5-inch disk drive, 128K of RAM and ROM and was reported to be backwards compatible with the C64 via an emulation mode, but was later found to be only partially so. With great new graphics chips, a new processor and twin SID chips, the C65 was hotly anticipated.

However, the machine was never commercially released due to the liquidation of Commodore in 1994. Several working prototypes of the C65 did make it out into the wild via various liquidation sales but the number of C65s known to exist is thought to be just 200.

If you couldn't flash your cash on a C65 then maybe you could plump for the newly price-cut Amiga. The 'Class Of The 90's' educational package containing the Amiga A500, TV modulator and educational and utility software was trimmed by £100 to £499.

Commodore also unveiled a new C64 package priced at just £99. The 'Playful Intelligence' bundle was the first to exclude a tape deck as Commodore reinforced its commitment to move away from tape-based software and into cartridges. Included in the package was an old four-game compilation cartridge including *International Soccer* and *Flimbo's Quest*.

Atari had also recently brought out a similar educational package for £399. Seemingly the great Atari ST/Amiga battle has spilt over into the educational sector.

Meanwhile, Atari officially pulled the plug on one of its games consoles. Development on the Atari Jaguar and Panther had been progressing well, with the Panther due for release within six months. However, the Jaguar's development was progressing much faster so Atari pooled its resources and closed down the Panther project.

Sega revealed the latest addition to its console family, the Mega-CD. Having been unveiled officially at a Japanese computer show, it was anticipated that it would make its UK debut early in 1992. The CD unit sat under the Mega Drive console, rather than being a standalone games system, yet it still promised some stunning games for the future. A price of £199 was mooted for the Mega-CD.

With the recent release of Philips' CDi, came a surprising move which saw gaming giant Nintendo signing its Mario and Zelda characters up for a slice of Philips CDi pie. Three *Zelda* games were to follow later…

US Gold, collector of tie-ins, film and TV licences and any one of a thousand arcade conversions, announced it had secured



» *Sword Of Vermilion* (Mega Drive): A slightly different style of RPG to the norm, but the game was never better than average.



» *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* (Amiga): A superb point-and-click adventure sees Indy taking on the Nazis again.



» New and highly rated, the *Street Fighter II* arcade machine would be coming to an arcade near you soon…



» (Super NES): This super-fast futuristic racing game set the standard for all future SNES/Famicom racers… and it's still a corker…



» *Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco And The Time Rippers* (PC): Any game featuring Latex Babes is good by us…

THIS MONTH IN... CHARTS

1991



JUNE NEWS

On 15 June the second largest volcanic eruption of the 20th Century occurs when Mount Pinatubo erupted in the Philippines. The nine-hour long event resulted in 800 deaths and over 100,000 people being made homeless.

On 9 June the first-ever World Bowl in the recently established World League of American Football was played between the London Monarchs and the Barcelona Dragons at Wembley Stadium.

» Such was the ferocity of Mount Pinatubo's eruption, an estimated 10 billion metric tons of magma was ejected. Better bring a spade…



» The London Monarchs played American Football… which is a bit like rugby but with lots of protective padding and crash helmets.

The WLAF consisted of ten teams from America, Canada and Europe and was initially a great success with crowds of over 40,000 for the London Monarchs' home games.

The World Bowl played to a crowd in excess of 61,000 and saw the London team triumph 21-0 over their Spanish counterparts. However, the team was retired in 1998 as interest dwindled considerably.

June also saw the US movie premieres of *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves*, *The Rocketeer* and the magnificently rubbish *Suburban Commando* starring Hulk Hogan.





» *Link: The Faces Of Evil* (Philips CDi): As *Zelda* games go this must rank as the most abysmal in the entire franchise.



» *Boulder Dash* (NES): The classic game got a new lease of life and a new audience with the new NES and Game Boy versions.

the rights to convert Sega's hottest property, *Sonic The Hedgehog*, to a variety of home computers including Amiga, Atari ST, Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad.

Disappointingly, the home micro versions of *Sonic* were merely wishful thinking on the most part and never got beyond more than a few screens of code with most versions not even starting development. Just how would a Spectrum or Amstrad have coped with a turbo-charged, ring-collecting, hedgehog-based game? If nothing else, it would've been an education in games conversion…

Boulder Dash, featuring the exploits of Rockford, was about to be rejuvenated and re-released on to Nintendo's NES and Game Boy formats. The basic gameplay proved to be the simple yet brilliant winning formula of old, gathering diamonds in awkward rock-encrusted corners, but this time you also had to progress through several sections on different worlds in a *Mario World*-style setup.

Another treasure-hunting hero set for a return was Dr Jones. LucasArts revealed that it was currently working on a fourth Indy game, entitled *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*.

What emerged were two games; a superb point-and-click adventure in the *Monkey Island* mould, available for the Amiga, PC and Mac. The second game was a more action-based 3D isometric graphic adventure available on the Amiga, ST, PC, Amstrad, C64 and Spectrum.

Rumours were rife that this fourth outing for Indy would form the basis of a new Indiana Jones movie, although Lucasfilm and Harrison Ford denied any prospect of a fourth movie ever happening… 17 short years later and Indy is flying through the air inside a fridge in a nuclear blast zone…

Computer & Video Games ran its gaming rule over *Mercs* (US Gold, Amiga), *Super Cars II* (Gremlin, Amiga), *Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco And The Time Rippers* (Sierra Online, PC), *World Class Leaderboard* (US Gold, Sega Master System), *Switchblade II* (Gremlin, Amiga), *Jet Fighter 2* (US Gold/Velocity, PC), *Sword Of Vermillion* (Sega, Mega Drive) and *Street Fighter II* (Arcade) with all receiving a minty fresh C&VG award for their troubles.

C&VG's sister magazine, *Mean Machines*, was frugally awarding its Mega Game honour to *Block Out* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *F-Zero* (Nintendo, Super NES) and *A Boy And His Blob* (Nintendo, NES).

The reviewers at *Raze* were equally severe with their grading, only giving out their Raze Rave status to *Strider* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Gain Ground* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Brat* (Mirrorsoft, Amiga) and *Killing Cloud* (Image Works, Amiga). Hard but fair…

ACE



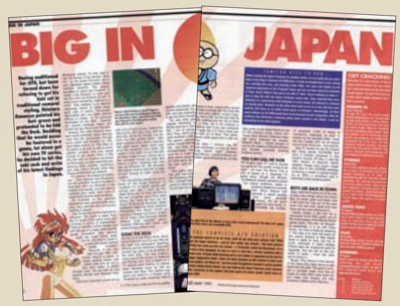
ACE looked at how Ocean Software constructed games that have been licensed from movies. The test subject was *Darkman* and *ACE* seemingly discovered a template that Ocean used for games of this ilk… a bit of beat-'em-up followed by the standard platform section with a surprise 3D element. Now you know!



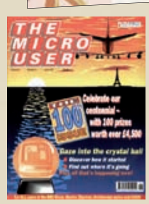
RAZE



Raze took a look at all things Japanese and highlighted the rumoured Super Famicom CD drive. The ongoing back story to this was that Sony was helping with the project, then wasn't, then was again and then went off to create something called the PlayStation.



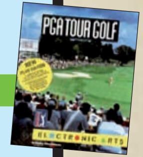
THE MICRO USER



Celebrating its 100th issue, *Micro User* featured how the BBC Micro came to be. The computer was only at the concept stage when Acorn was asked to tender a machine for the BBC contract. It was hastily built, the meeting with the BBC went well and the rest is history…



JUNE 1991



AMIGA

1. PGA Golf Tour (Electronic Arts)
2. NAM (Domark)
3. Lemmings (Psygnosis)
4. Speedball 2 (Mirrorsoft)
5. Super Monaco GP (US Gold)



ATARI ST

1. Lemmings (Psygnosis)
2. Final Whistle (Anco)
3. Speedball (Mirrorsoft)
4. Panza Kick Boxing (US Gold/Futura)
5. Elvira (Accolade)



PC

1. Sim Earth (Ocean/ Maxis)
2. Wing Commander (Origin/Mindscape)
3. A.T.P. (Sub Logic)
4. Aircraft & Scenery Designer (Microsoft)
5. Space Quest IV (Sierra Online)

MUSIC

1. I Wanna Sex You Up (Color Me Badd)
2. Any Dream Will Do (Jason Donovan)
3. Baby Baby (Amy Grant)
4. The Shoop Shoop Song (Cher)
5. Thinking About Your Love (Kenny Thomas)



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

PARADROID 90

PAUL KITCHING HAS PLENTY OF LOVE FOR THIS 16-BIT SEQUEL



- » PUBLISHER: HEWSON
- » RELEASED: 1990
- » GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » FEATURED HARDWARE: AMIGA 500
- » EXPECT TO PAY: £5+

HISTORY

In this follow-up to the C64 original, you again take control of an 'Influence Device', and are beamed aboard a ship that has been overrun by droids. There are five ships (plus the Raiders ship, accessed by collecting a key on each of the five main ships), which all have a different layout/colour/number of decks and droids, unlike the C64 original.

Your objective is to destroy all the droids that patrol each ship. This is achieved by shooting them or simply transferring into them. There are 13 different droids, each with their own look/weapon/sensors. Upon transferring to a droid you enter a small sub-game, where you take control by connecting pulsers to a circuit board. Whichever droid has the most connections at the end wins.

If you're the Influence Device and the other droid beats you it's game over, otherwise you lose your current droid and have to find another. The better the droid, the more pulsers you get.

The decks have energisers that restore your energy levels, and consoles that give details on the deck, ship, droids, and other handy game stats. All decks are accessed by lifts and can be tackled in any order. Once a ship is cleared you move on to the next by accessing a transmat.

Being a fan of the original *Paradroid*, I was looking forward to this sequel. While I liked it, I found its difficulty level to be 'off the scale'. The control method for transferring sometimes causes death by disengaging when you lose your slave droid and you have to re-activate it while avoiding the droid that's shooting you.

There are also several differences to the original C64 version. The main one being that the screen only scrolls vertically. I did get used to this after a while, but it feels strange to begin with. Also, droids aren't shown by their numbers – they instead look like the droids they represent.

Sound, music and graphics are all well done, and overall it's definitely worth a look, if, like me, you're a big fan of the original.

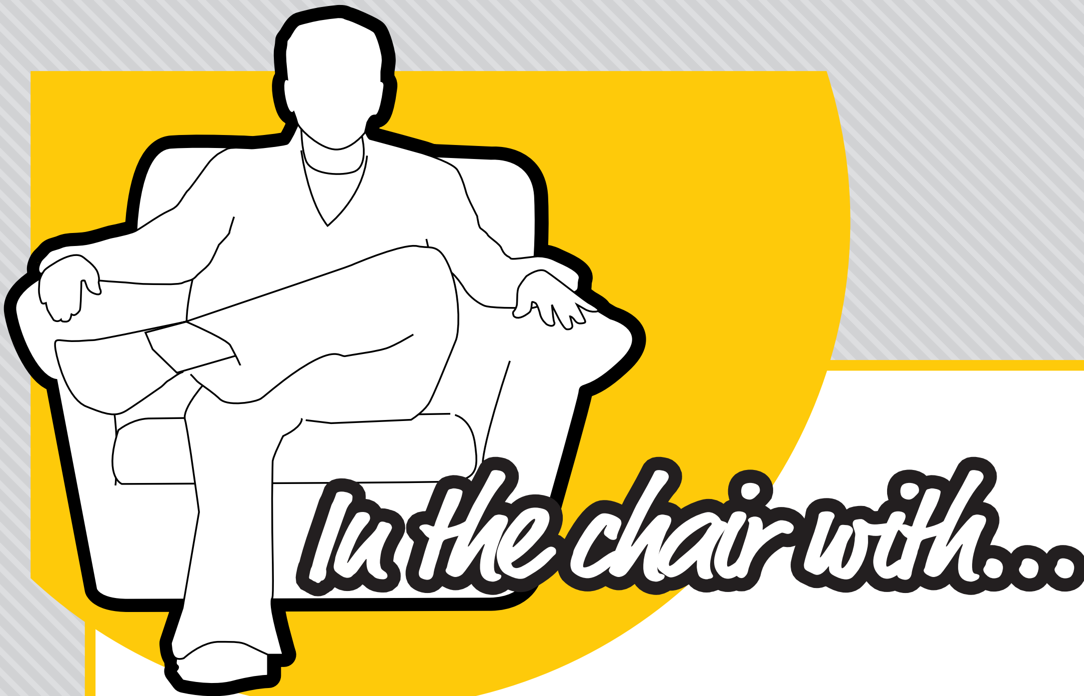
Want to appear in the magazine? Then be sure to upload classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net





RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** PAUL KITCHING
» **JOINED:** 18 JULY 2008
» **LOCATION:** MIDDLESBROUGH
» **OCCUPATION:** CAD DESIGNER
» **FAV GAMES SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64 AND AMIGA



JON RITMAN

He made his name with the Spectrum equivalent of International Soccer, then went on to make some of the best-loved isometric adventures of all time. Darran Jones caught up with Jon Ritman at his local pub and discovered there's so much more to him than Match Day and Head Over Heels

JON RITMAN HAS been in the industry now for a very long time. After cutting his teeth at Artic Computing, he had a fantastic period with Ocean Software, moved to Rare and then formed his own company, Cranberry Source. Cranberry's staff were taken over by Argonaut a few years later, and Jon seemingly retired from the industry, apparently lost to the sands of time. And yet Ritman is still making games, he's just doing it out of the public eye. He tired of the politics of studio work and simply went back to coding at home. What follows then is just a taster of the two-hour conversation we enjoyed at Hythe's Red Lion… over a coupe of San Miguels and some tasty homemade burgers.

RETRO GAMER: So, Jon, what did you want to do while you were still at school?

JON RITMAN: I had absolutely no idea, apart from not wanting to be at school, so I didn't go a lot of the time [laughs].

RG: So when you did eventually leave school, what job did you find yourself in?

JR: I joined what was then part of the post office, which in fact they eventually turned into BT. So I was a telephone engineer. I started training, and the training was brilliant, but the block release at college was just unbelievably tedious.

So I then messed around for quite a few years doing lots of crappy little jobs. I was at Courts, the furnisher, in their warehouse, where I used to be the assistant manager. Then, after another extended period of unemployment and being harassed by my father, I signed up to a government training course to become a television engineer.

RG: And what was that like?

JR: Well the main attraction was that the course wasn't due to start for nine months, so I could lounge around for the next nine months knowing I wouldn't get harassed as I had a job to go to [laughs].

So I went on the six-month course, learnt to be a television engineer and eventually joined Radio Rentals. I was there for about a year and then they decided that they were going to rent out the old Atari 400s, and I thought to myself: 'well, they're going to need engineers', so I thought it would be a good idea to find out something about computers.

RG: So were you self-taught as a programmer?

JR: Oh, totally. Probably the biggest luck of my career was that the ZX81 manual was so well written and as a result I was basically able to teach myself BASIC in a week.

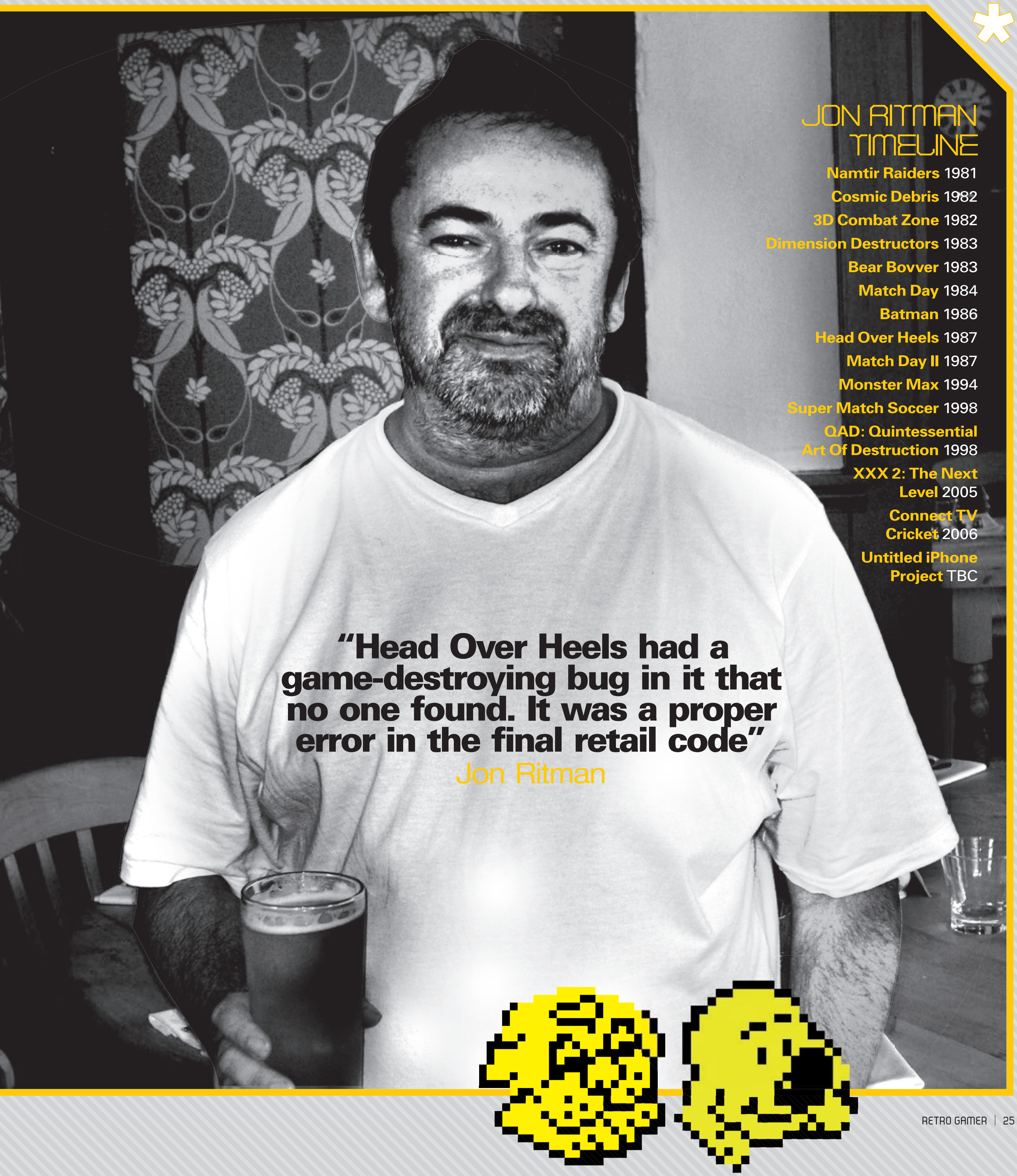
I then picked up a book on machine code from my local shop and spent the first night trying to get a piece of code to work. Basically, it said, 'put these numbers into the memory and then run them' and it just didn't work. I spent all night trying to work out what I had done wrong and it turned out that the very first line of code they had written in the book was a mistake. That could have been the end of my career there and then, but luckily I picked up another book that was far better [laughs].

RG: So you particularly enjoyed the problem-solving element of programming then?

JR: What you have to remember is at the time I was still a television engineer. Now the thing you do when mending televisions is you think of the signal path. It's coming in at the aerial socket and it's coming out of the tube. So the first thing you do if you've got no idea where to look for the problem is to go halfway along between the two and go: 'Is it working as it should do at this point?'

DOWNLOAD THE PODCAST

If you're interested in learning more about Jon's background then the full interview can be found at **www.retrogamer.net**



JON RITMAN TIMELINE

Namtir Raiders 1981
Cosmic Debris 1982
3D Combat Zone 1982
Dimension Destructors 1983
Bear Bovver 1983
Match Day 1984
Batman 1986
Head Over Heels 1987
Match Day II 1987
Monster Max 1994
Super Match Soccer 1998
QAD: Quintessential Art Of Destruction 1998
XXX 2: The Next Level 2005
Connect TV Cricket 2006
Untitled iPhone Project TBC

"Head Over Heels had a game-destroying bug in it that no one found. It was a proper error in the final retail code"
Jon Ritman

And if it's not then you look before and if it is you look after it. And you basically dissect and search for the problem until you find it. It's exactly the same process for programming.

RG: So, once you had the correct book how did things progress?

JR: I can still remember the first thing I wrote from that book. There was a little spaceship sitting at the bottom of the screen and basically you had a left and right control and it was meant to go left and right, but mine either went to the far right or far left [laughing]. I eventually worked out what the problem was, but only by working out how to slow everything right down.

RG: So how did you end up getting in touch with Ocean?

JR: Ocean actually got in touch with me. I went to a show with somebody who worked at Artic Computing [my publisher at the time] and we were talking to some of the distributors that were around to find out what they were interested in. They were all totally unanimous; they all wanted *International Soccer* on the Spectrum. I'd seen *International Soccer* over and over again in Dixons shop windows but I had never played it and I deliberately didn't play it after that show.

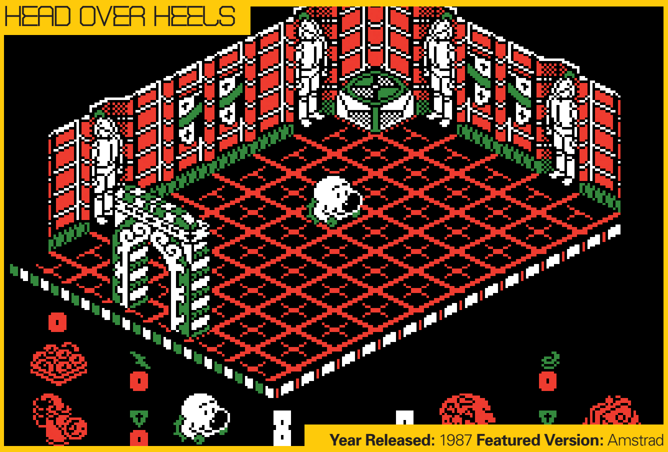
I'm not interested in football, hadn't been since I was a little kid, as it bored me senseless but there was obviously a market for it, so I went to work. I had been writing this game for about two weeks and went to another show at Ally Pally where we were showing *Bear Bovver* and I found myself looking at *World Cup Carnival*.

David Ward of Ocean was standing next to me and I said to him: 'My football game's going to be loads better than that'. Which was pretty brash considering I had only just managed to get the sprites on screen.

Anyway, round about nine months later, I got a phone call from David asking how that football game had turned out. I was literally in the middle of closing it up and there were only a few days left to go on it. Anyway he offered me more money than I'd ever considered having in one hand.

* FIVE TO PLAY

HEAD OVER HEELS



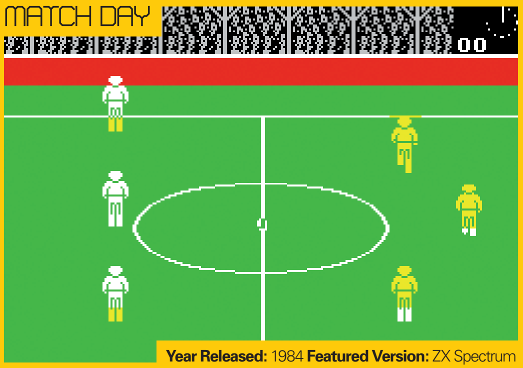
Year Released: 1987 **Featured Version:** Amstrad

HAILED BY THOSE who haven't played *Monster Max* as Jon Ritman's crowning achievement, *Head Over Heels* is quite simply the greatest isometric adventure of all time (if you don't believe us then check out our Top 25 Isometric Games feature starting on page 66). Originally known as the not so charming *Foot And Mouth*, *Head Over Heels* pushed Bernie Drummond's visual talents to brand new levels of freakishness and allowed Jon to really flex his coding muscles.

Huge in both size and scope (it's twice the size of *Batman*, featuring over 300 rooms to explore), the biggest enjoyment of *Head Over Heels* comes from getting the two spies back together – being able to see each other right at the game's beginning is a stroke of genius – and then using them to solve Jon's fiendishly designed puzzles.

A truly beautiful game to look at (especially on the Amstrad CPC), brilliantly paced and constantly challenging, *Head Over Heels* remains not only one of Jon's greatest games, but also one of the best isometric adventures that we've ever played. And considering how many actually exist, that's very high praise indeed!

MATCH DAY



Year Released: 1984 **Featured Version:** ZX Spectrum

EVEN JON HIMSELF will admit that the original *Match Day* has not aged very well, but there's no denying its impact on the Spectrum when it was released in 1984. Yes, the converted *Bear Bovver* sprites look laughable now and it lacks the skill and finesse of its superior sequel, but Ritman still receives plenty of positive praise about his first Ocean release.

Jon's answer to Andrew Spencer's *International Soccer* received 86% in *Crash* and it was said that it "put all other Spectrum football games in the shade". Not a bad attempt for someone who had no love for football. A word of advice though, if you must play *Match Day* then stick with the Speccy outing, as the Amstrad conversion – not actually by Jon – is absolutely awful.

BATMAN



Year Released: 1986 **Featured Version:** Amstrad

WE'RE NOT SURE how he went from hit footy game to isometric adventure starring one of DC's most famous comic heroes, but we're glad it happened.

Jon's pairing with Bernie Drummond turned out brilliantly, with Drummond's quirky sprites adding to *Batman*'s appeal. Loved by pretty much every Spectrum and Amstrad mag that reviewed it, *Batman* takes a similar gameplay route to Ultimate's isometric games and has the iconic hero searching for Robin and seven missing pieces of the Batcraft.

Interestingly, Robin was due to appear as a playable character, but Jon was unable to work out how to control two characters simultaneously. Luckily, he worked his way around that little problem for the excellent *Head Over Heels*.

MATCH DAY II

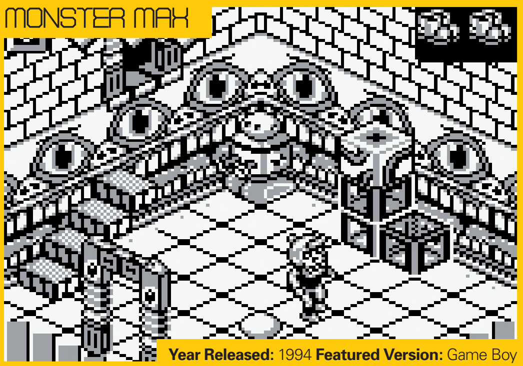


Year Released: 1987 **Featured Version:** Commodore 64

JON TOOK INTO account all of the criticisms of the original *Match Day*, then returned three years later with the much-improved *Match Day II*.

The most obvious are the new sprites that Bernie created for the game, but there was also plenty of depth to be discovered should you be brave enough to work your way through *Match Day II*'s well-presented menus, such as the Diamond Deflection System that offered stunning new heights of realism as the computer would work out how the ball should bounce off moving players. Add in the ability to control the strength of kicks, greatly improved player AI and a range of different leagues and cups to compete in and it's hardly surprising that many still consider it the best 8-bit football game of all time.

MONSTER MAX



Year Released: 1994 **Featured Version:** Game Boy

FIRST CHAMPIONED BY us all the way back in issue 33, *Monster Max* is not only Jon and Bernie's biggest game, but it's also one of their best. While the puzzles may have lacked the ingenuity that came from having to control two separate characters in *Head Over Heels*, they were no less impressive.

What we like most about Bernie and Jon's last game is how well suited it was to the Game Boy's screen. The isometric adventure looks pretty, even now, with intricately designed game worlds laced with the pair's humour. It oozes polish, with almost every aspect of the game meshing together to create a cohesive whole that no other similar outing on the Game Boy can match. Why it took Titus nearly a year to get this out is beyond us.

RG: Can you say?

JR: It was £25,000. That was a down payment. Bearing in mind this was 1983 or something; my previous wage for a year at Radio Rentals was £7,500, so £25,000 in one go was amazing, and that was just the advance. Add to that the fact that I was paid in dollars, which at the time was considerably more and that was that. *Match Day* was released a short while later.

RG: So, it was all smooth sailing from then on?

JR: Well we did have a few problems with it. I had been working with Chris Clarke and basically he was hiding his mistakes from me. He was only doing the front end, but when you put it in the game it just didn't work properly. It turned out that he had never tested it all put together; he had only tested little bits of it. I then basically locked him in my house and wouldn't let him leave for three days. We just hammered through this code, got it working and finally got it out.

RG: So you always worked on the Spectrum first and then went over to the Amstrad?

JR: Initially, with *Match Day* and *Batman*. After that though I was pretty much doing both simultaneously.

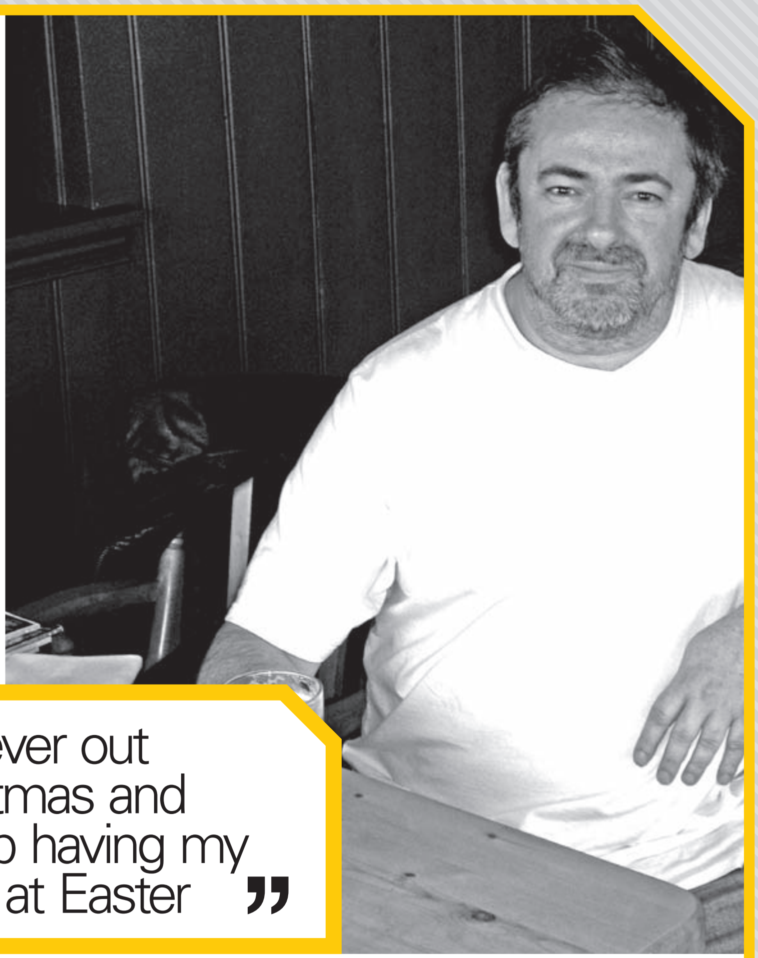
RG: So how did you get in touch with Bernie Drummond?

JR: I had some friends who had formed a band and they were advertising for a drummer and Bernie Drummond was that drummer. Anyway I knew that he doodled a lot, so I invited him around and said: 'Do you think you can do anything on the computer?' And I gave him a little program that I used for drawing with – a joystick driven thing.

RG: And did it work?

JR: Well, I watched him do absolutely nothing for two hours. He was scribbling as far as I could see. Then all of a sudden he said: 'Look at that eye!' and he found a little spot in this mess that he had randomly created. And suddenly he started to be really careful. He got rid of everything else and drew a matching eye next to it and it was really strange to see this total chaos suddenly become calmed and controlled. And then he drew a character out of it and that character became known as Budweiser and he became one of the first characters you come across in *Batman*.

We then discussed the fact that we could actually work together and do this and tried to think about what to actually do and at some point I kind of randomly suggested *Batman*. Bernie did a little character and I took it up to Ocean. The engine wasn't written at this stage and we just had Batman running around in an environment similar to the *Knight Lore* screens. Anyway we showed it to David Ward and he immediately started singing the theme tune and Ocean set to work getting the rights.



> "I was never, ever out in time for Christmas and always ended up having my games released at Easter"

RG: Did you always have a lot of freedom when coming up with ideas?

JR: Absolutely. 100 per cent. Ocean would just put facilities in my direction as much as they could. They never asked me to do anything in particular; they just put people at my disposal when needed and gave me any new equipment that I asked for.

RG: Was it this lack of interference that helped to make your games so successful? You could make your vision so to speak.

JR: Yes. For example, I was never, ever out in time for Christmas and always ended up having my games released at Easter, which actually turned out quite good at the time, mainly because the press were desperate for anything that was released at that time of year [laughs].

RG: So, after your success at Ocean, what made you decide to move on to Rare?

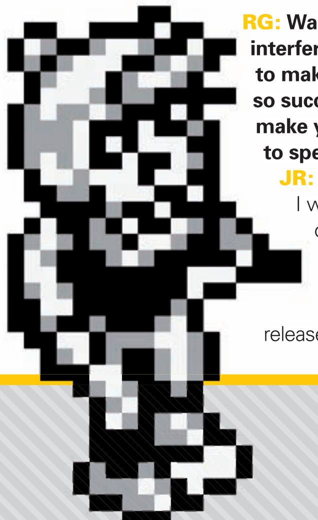
JR: Because Rare was one of the only companies that I had any respect for. They had amazed me on several occasions and came up with countless innovations. They were the coolest company around, easily. I remember that they did a big interview in *Crash* and they were basically advertising for people via the interview, so I wrote them a letter and eventually went up to see them. It had turned out that they had been playing my games, while I had been playing theirs. And they told me later that one of the reasons why they hired me was because they had never had anybody go there who had so arrogantly assumed that if he wanted to go in he would. It just never crossed my mind at the time that I might get turned down.

This was at a time when everything was a great success for me. I could have walked into any company and was frequently approached by many companies. When I was working on *Match Day II* I was approached by Mirrorsoft who had just offered me a huge advance for it. Absolutely huge. And I just went back to Ocean and said that they had offered me this much, so Ocean just said: 'Okay, we'll match it'.

So yeah, I went to Rare; and I'm not sure if it was a very smart move on my part on reflection, but it was an interesting time.

RG: So what was it like being part of a larger team?

JR: Well, I wasn't, to be honest. I was employed by Rare but it was still just Bernie and me. I did have many conversations with Chris Stamper, usually at 2am, as he was another person who liked to work through the night. They were basically designing this new arcade board and we were working on that with them. They had designed and built the board and I guess I wrote the operating system for it, actually got DOS running on it more or less and I tried running games through that. As it turns out I wasn't very good at making arcade games, it just wasn't my style. I didn't recognise that the sort of games I did, which had a very long learning curve, were completely unsuitable for an arcade machine. If somebody isn't successful on an arcade machine on their first go they don't put another ten pence in,



whereas my games expected you still to be learning weeks later.

RG: So you went to Rare specifically to work on the arcade side of things, but it wasn't really working out?

JR: It looked like an attractive option but I was completely unsuccessful at it. We did finish a game; a football game called *Final Whistle* and put it out in the market for test and trials. As it happens there was another football game being tested in the same arcade as ours. It walked all over us, basically because it was so much easier to play. I recognised from that that I wasn't very good at this and that I needed to go back to doing games that could feature the longer learning curve. I actually did a development system for Rare that was used on many of their games, the GLAM (Global Language Assembler Monitor) system as it was known, which at its time was very advanced. Then, when I finished that, I wrote a game on the Game Boy, which Rare then farmed out to Titus and they just did the worst things I've seen when publishing a game. It was just a fiasco.

RG: This was Monster Max right?

JR: Yes, that's right. It got fantastic reviews, absolutely fantastic. We put it out for review in January, but they didn't get it on the shelves until October. Everybody had completely forgotten about it by then. I've just no idea why that took so long.

RG: So was it reasons like that that made you decide to leave Rare?

JR: Yeah. I didn't really know what to do after that as it had all been a bit of a disaster. At that point I was hawking a development system around to a number of publishers and I went to Sega in London. I showed them this development kit and they said to me: 'Would you be at all interested in working for us?' They invited me to an interview, but because of me being at Rare and everything that had happened to me earlier I was still quite arrogant and I didn't really like the idea of applying for the interview. After about five or ten minutes I just said: 'All right, let's just pull back a bit, because I don't want to waste anybody's time. If you're going to be offering me the £15,000 to £20,000 a year that you're offering the rest of your programmers I'll leave now. So let's know where we all are on this.' I just watched as the two guys' jaws dropped.

I was then approached by Domark and began creating a football game for them for the SNES. Anyway, about a month after I started, Sega phoned me up and offered me a job [starts laughing again]. Which was just bizarre. Did they really think I'd wait around for the three-and-a-half months that it had taken them to get back to me and not do anything in that time?

RG: It must have been nice, though, to have constantly been in demand like you were?

JR: Oh, absolutely. So I did the SNES job, which was never launched, which is a shame as it was a really good game and it looked fantastic. I had it using lots of Mode 7 rotation and it ended up looking like it was running on a far more expensive machine than it was, but unfortunately it had a bug in it. Just one bug. Basically, once every three days of play it would just lock up. It was literally just once every three days and we would just play it endlessly just waiting for it to lock up. I put all sorts of routines in to find out where the problem was in the code and it would just be in a different place every time and we never found it. Domark had been taken over by then by Ian Livingstone and I said to him that the only way I could find this bug was if you can get me some very expensive kit that emulates a SNES, but stores every single thing along the way so that you could look back at time and see exactly where it had gone wrong. I'd used kits like this before on Rare's arcade board and they got me this kit after about three months, but they got me the wrong one. They ended up getting the NTSC kit instead of the PAL version and never got around to getting me the correct kit, so the game just tailed off.

RG: That must have been very frustrating for you.

JR: Oh, definitely. By that time though I had already started up Cranberry Source with Jon Cook.

RG: That must have been a massive change to what you were used to?

JR: It was, yes. Not one that I particularly enjoyed either. It was all right. It was just very frustrating for me, suddenly realising that I was working for people who were employed, as opposed to doing something because they really wanted to do it. I mean they were enthusiastic about games, but I guess their approach was different to what I was used to. It was very hard for me to manage people and I don't think that I was very good at it. Well I know I wasn't very good at it. I'd be a complete bastard if I did it again, because before I was too much their mate. I was nowhere near hard enough. But you know it's easy to recognise all that afterwards.

> "We put it out for review in January, but it wasn't in shops until October and everybody had forgotten about it"

RG: Tell us a little about the games you were working on at Cranberry Source.

JR: We had three games in the pipeline. *QAD: Quintessential Art Of Destruction*, *Redemption* and *Match Day III*. However, Ocean was massively going bankrupt at the time and before it was finished they were collapsing, so we transferred the game to Acclaim and a very strange thing happened over the name. Do you know the history behind the name *Match Day*?

RG: There's a story about *Match Day*'s name?

JR: When we originally did *Match Day*, Ocean wanted to call it *Match Of The*



*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Monster Max was released in **1994**

Jon had **5** games published by Artic

Namtir Raiders was Jon's very first published game. It was released in **1981**

It took him a total of **3** months to write, but he was still working full-time as a television engineer

Head Over Heels features **301** isometric screens to traverse

Ritman was paid **£25,000** by Ocean for *Match Day*

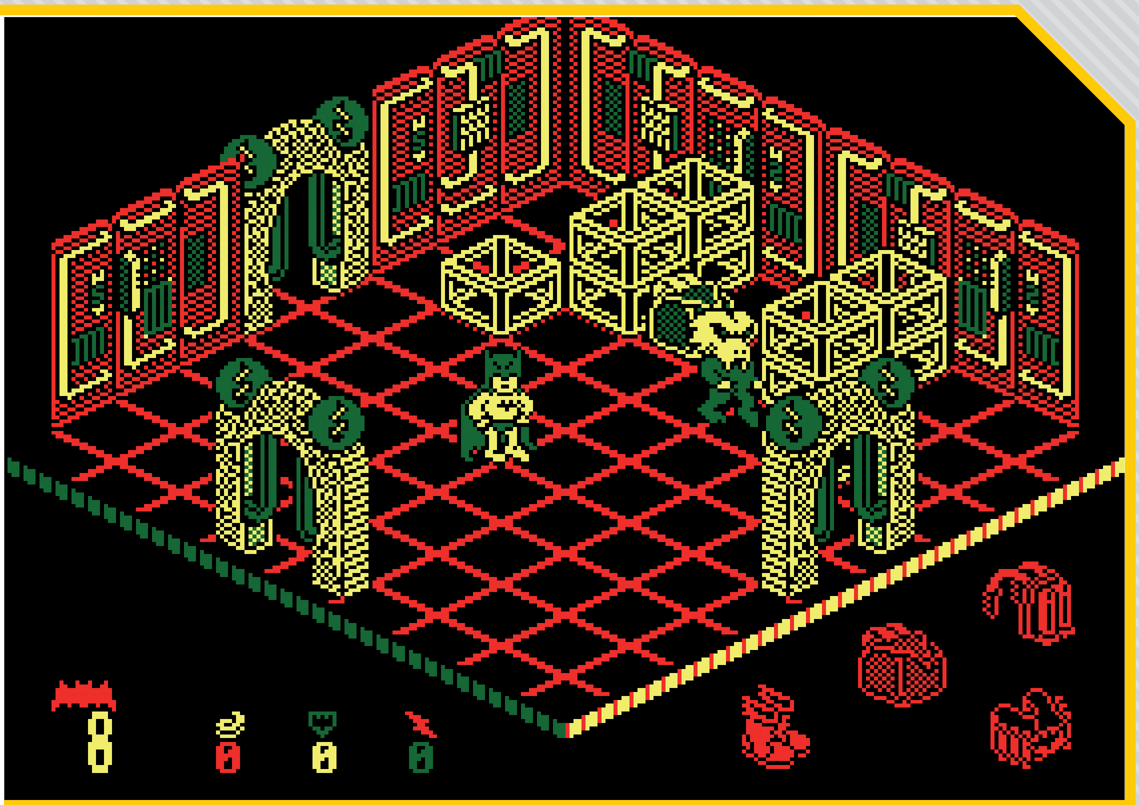
After a few debugging issues it was released in **1987**

Ritman and Bernie Drummond worked on **5** published games together before finally parting ways

£7.95: The price the ZX Spectrum version of *Head Over Heels* originally sold for

97%: And the overall score it received in *Crash* magazine

Jon has now been creating games for **28** years



» Batman was Jon's answer to Ultimate's Knight Lore and it's a truly beautiful piece of work with great puzzles and brilliantly designed sprites.

Day. Anyway, they negotiated with the TV company and they got what they thought were the rights, but they ended up just getting the rights to the music but not the name.

RG: So how come *Super Match Soccer* wasn't called *Match Day III*?

JR: Acclaim's lawyers asked *Match Of The Day* if they could use the name *Match Day* and they were duly told no. [Long pause]. I think it's actually a very good game, but it was in the era of *FIFA*, where *FIFA* had become so easy to play, and it always was easy to play. When we were showing *Super Match Soccer* I had watched journalists play it and basically they didn't want to make any effort with it. So it didn't get very good reviews. Some people got it, there were a few people that tried it and realised that it had a lot more depth and that far more skill was required to get anywhere in it, but clearly many journalists just wanted to score an overhead kick on their first game and that was just never going to happen.

RG: That's quite ironic really, as nowadays it's that very depth – or illusion of depth – that journalists are so keen on seeing in football games.

JR: Yeah, well there you go. Actually it was the only game at the time where you could actually play into space and it would pull the camera back and effectively say 'you can put the ball anywhere you want'. You could swerve it, you could kick it at various different strengths and it meant that you could play the game like football and run people on to it. Chuck it through their offence and then run somebody round it. It worked very well like that, but it didn't appeal to the journalists, so it didn't get very good reviews and as a result publishers didn't put much behind it and it didn't sell very well.

RG: Weren't you supposed to be working on a new *Head Over Heels* game on the N64 at Cranberry?

JR: No, that was *Redemption*, but it never got very far. We had a contract with Philips to do *Redemption* but they pulled out, Psygnosis then did the same. By then we had to lay people off at that point because we couldn't afford to keep them on. It was going to be a 3D adventure, well that was the plan anyway…

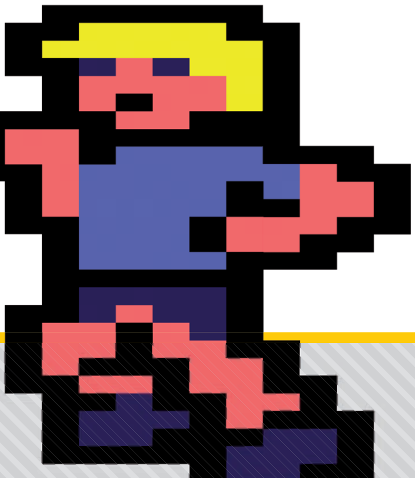
RG: So that's the myth about a *Head Over Heels* sequel destroyed. Were there any other big games that you worked on that never saw the light of day?

JR: We did two things on the arcade machine for Rare. One of them was *Final Whistle*, while the other was an experiment that Rare didn't really like the look of. It was not dissimilar to *Pipe Mania*, except you were a train and you were building track in front of it. Oh, and we also worked on a gambling game. I can't remember what happened to it, but it was called *Spot The Ball*. Basically it would show a football sequence and then you would spot the ball. You could pay for different amounts to gamble, which would give you more crosses, or a bigger cross and it was also set up so that the operators could adjust the odds of winning. I really can't remember much else about it, but I don't think it was finished.

But then Argonaut came along and they offered to take on all our people. They didn't take over the company name or anything, they just employed all the people and part of that was a lock-in for me at Argonaut. Which was a really terrible time.

RG: In what way?

JR: It was just a very bizarre experience. First of all they got me in and when I arrived there Jez [San], the owner, was away on holiday, so all my dealings were with the general manager. He basically said that he wanted me to look at the company and give a report on what I saw. So I just walked around and spoke to



the people there [about a hundred of them]. There was lots of game development going on, lots of tiny bits of game development going on and every week I went back to John and said: 'The problem you have here is that your game designers are the bottom of the pile.' They were getting ridden over by everyone else and I just said: 'Look, you need a separate department of designers. They should have their separate boss and I should be that boss.'

Then there was an issue with too many games being made. A programmer might come along and mention that they had a great idea for a game and they were just told to go ahead and get on with it. There were loads of these little projects going on and they weren't necessarily going to be good games. You needed to have somebody for it to go through so they could filter out the crap and just make sure that you had the right games being started.

So I went to John and the rest of the board, explained my plan and they all agreed with it and said to wait until Jez was back. Anyway, Jez came back and he just said: 'Nah, I don't fancy that. I think you should just do what I do and walk around the company and just make suggestions.'

Well that was it, by the end of it I was literally going in, putting my feet up and just reading a book. This went on for about eight weeks and in the end I just went to the development boss and asked for redundancy. I went home, started programming in my spare room again and thought: 'Why did I ever stop doing this, because I really like it this way.' And I've been doing this ever since.

RG: So you've still been making games for the last 15 years then?

JR: Oh, definitely. I've been quite fortunate really and I spent three years working with Geoff Crammond. He was working on his latest racing game and he wanted it converted to various other platforms like the PlayStation and Dreamcast. The only trouble was that Geoff is very secretive about his code. He never wanted anyone to see it (which was hardly surprising as it was magnificent code), but it meant that I was supposed to convert this code without ever actually seeing it. It was meant to be quite a short job, about three months, but because it was difficult for me to see the code it ended up lasting for three years. Then the company that he was writing it for, which was MicroProse was bought out and then that company was bought out by somebody else and they already had a racing game. So after all that it was: 'Byeeeee.'

RG: That must have been devastating.

JR: Well it definitely was for Geoff. Not so much for me I suppose, because I wasn't involved in the actual game creation. I was just the translator.

RG: Even so, to put that much of your life into something.

JR: Yeah, absolutely, and it was a shame because he was a great guy to work with. Very smart was Geoff. He knows his physics inside out, far more than I do and he was absolutely anal about detail. But that's why what he did was so magnificent. Just to give you an idea. When Geoff was dealing with the friction of the wheels, he didn't just deal with four wheels warming up, but with the individual sections of each tyre. One day he said: 'I just put some rain in.' For me that would be, we'll have some rainfall, make the track a bit wet and do some random sweeps that switches the rain on and off, but Geoff had modelled the winds, the clouds, the raindrops, puddles forming on the track, the effect of the friction on the wheels. Every single detail was accurate. And I was like: 'My god. Nobody will ever know.' The level of detail he went to was magnificent, absolutely magnificent.



> "Geoff is very secretive about his code. That meant I was supposed to convert this code without ever seeing it"

RG: So for the last few years you've been working on mobile games and are currently creating something for the iPhone. Is this an area you can see yourself staying in now?

JR: Yeah, I think so. Simply because it allows me to do stuff on my own. Small-scale stuff means that I can work from home and don't have to go into an office, I can basically do what I like again.

I've just written this game on the PC, but it should be easily transferable to the iPhone. I need to get some art done to replace my place holders but it's a very retro-styled game – something that you can easily dip in and out of and there's about 50 levels. It can take you a matter of seconds to complete a level, although it's unlikely to use the tilt mechanism, as it's not really suitable.

RG: So what do you think of the current state of the industry?

JR: The single biggest thing is the restriction that scale was bound to bring on ideas. When you have somebody who can sit in their bedroom for four months, six months, a year, maybe just in their evenings who can create an entirely new concept of game and all that's being used is their time. You can get a great number of ideas tried.

But when you have a team that's costing you a hundred thousand pounds a month to run, that's just not possible. The bean counters have to be able to point to a profit, so it's very difficult, unless someone has an enormous track record of innovation, to present something to the accountants so that you can convince them that what you're creating looks like something that's likely to be picked up. Because otherwise you get: 'That game last year was successful, can't you just do another one of those?' It's just really hard to get innovation now because of the scale. Well, at least until the Nintendo Wii arrived.

RG: So why do you think the Wii is so good then?

JR: Well it's the control system, isn't it? It has opened up the market to casual gamers. When you look back at the big opuses on the other consoles, who would have thought that games like *WarioWare: Smooth Moves*, where you can actually learn everything you need to do in a few seconds, would take centre stage?

RG: Surely the simplicity helps as well, though. A lot of 8-bit games were often extremely simple to pick up and play, and with the Wii it seems like gaming has almost come full circle.

JR: I think that makes a huge difference. An absolutely huge difference, because it opens the market up even further. Only a schoolboy has got time to learn ten-button sequences to perform particular moves in a fighting game, for example, and no one else will play it because they can't be bothered to learn all of that. I think having simplicity is important and the Wii's done that with the added feature that you've got this control that anyone can understand. Look at *Mario Kart*. The vast majority of it can be done by just tilting a wheel. Anyone can do that.

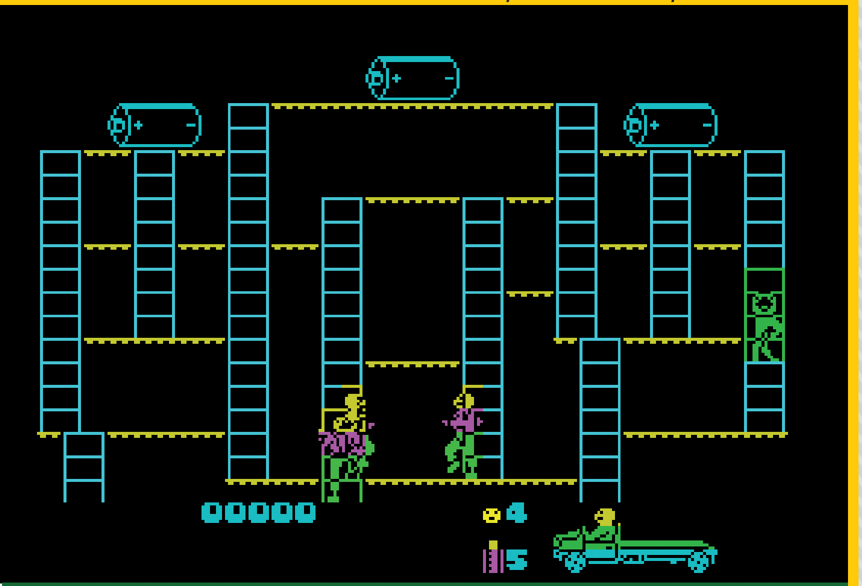
RG: You obviously have a lot of respect for Nintendo. Have you not considered releasing anything on WiiWare?

JR: I would love to be able to work on the Wii or on the DS, but Nintendo are much tighter, than say, the iPhone, about who works on the kit. You have to be a limited company. You need to have registered premises, all this sort of stuff to develop games for them and I just don't want to do all that crap.

RG: Before you go can you tell us something you've not told anyone else before?

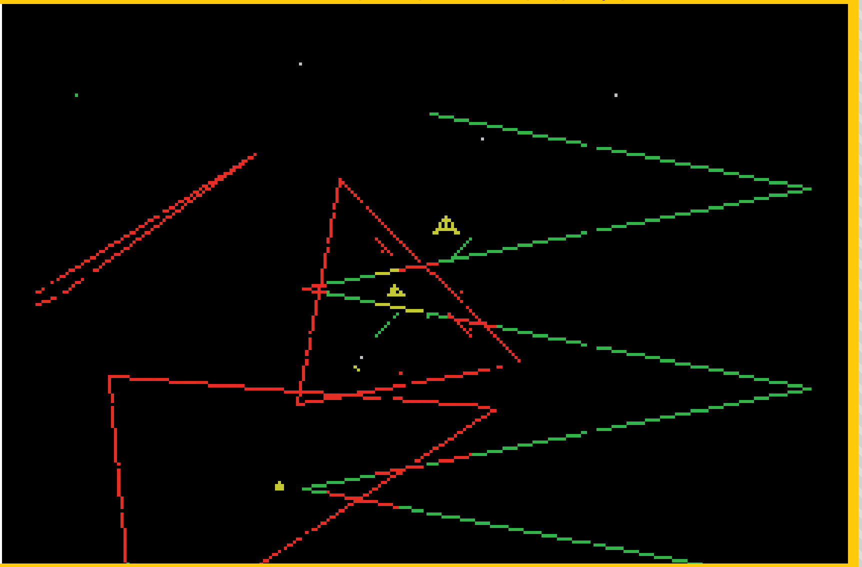
JR: Well, *Head Over Heels* had a game-destroying bug in it that no one found. I remember a friend coming around to see it and I sat him at a Spectrum and he started playing, while I went down to the corner shop. By the time I had got back it had locked up. I was like 'Jon, what did you do?' Anyway, we restarted and he just said to me: 'I did this' and it locked up again! Basically there was this bug that went something like, if one of them went in to a room and then the other one went into the room and the first one died [I can't remember the exact circumstances, but it happened right near to the beginning of the game]. It was a proper error in the final retail code, but no one has ever mentioned it to me before.

» If the characters in Bear Bovver loaok familiar it's because they were reused for Match Day.





» The Amstrad conversion of Match Day wasn't by Jon and was very sluggish to play.



» Like many of his early games Dimension Destructors is based on the games Jon played in arcades.

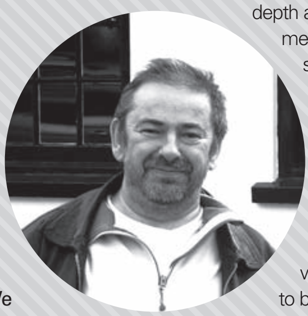
YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

After creating so many great games over the years it was inevitable that our readers would have their own probing questions for Jon. Here are just a few of them…

Are you still in touch with Bernie?
I haven't spoken with him for years.

Why were there less isometric adventures on the C64?
Because of the screen format. You have to remember that with the Commodore, people were used to having full colour, but when doing an isometric game you couldn't do that, you had to go back to mono, which looked very primitive. People were used to it on the Spectrum so it didn't matter, but on the Commodore it was seen as not that acceptable.

Why did *Batman* never come out on the C64?
The person who normally did Ocean's Commodore 64 conversions wasn't working for them at the time, so they never suggested it. We were out on all the Z80 platforms, which is a shame as it was pretty damned successful and ended up selling around 50-60,000 at full price. Then it sold just as many again when it was released on one of Ocean's compilations. After that they decided that they needed to have everything on multiple platforms.



Did you hear anything about the fabled *Mire Mare* while you were working at Rare?
No. It's funny though, because they told me all sorts of things and they were never secretive when you were talking to them. You know about *Knight Lore* being held back I assume? They were sitting on it for about a year as they were convinced that it would affect sales of other games that they had coming out. It's very brave to hold a game of that scale down for so long. Imagine if someone else had come up with the same idea. That would have affected sales a lot.

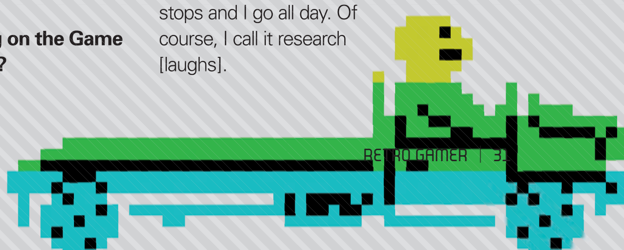
Was it easier working on the Game Boy than the Spectrum?
It was actually. The processor inside the Game Boy is basically a cut-down Z80 and as a result was very similar to the processor I was used to working on. So in terms of coding it was much the same. In fact, I actually had more room than I was used to as it had a much bigger memory.

What's the best game you've played in the last 20 years?
It has to be the latest *Zelda. The Twilight Princess*. I think Miyamoto is a total genius and I'll play anything of his that I can get my hands on. I just love the depth and scale of it. It lasted me a good three weeks of solid play.

What game would you have loved to have been involved with?
It would have to be the same game. I mean what a simply epic game to be involved with. What fun to be able to just come up with all of those ideas and tie them all together.

What's the first videogame you can remember playing?
Well, when I first got the ZX81 the first game I can remember playing was a pack with five games in that was actually by a guy who did some very good games after that, but this particular program was a pile of crap. As a complete non-programmer I thought to myself: 'I can do better than this. Surely I can? This is rubbish [laughs]'. Prior to that though the only games I used to play were those that were around, like *Pong*, which I used to play down the pub.

Which particular genre do you enjoy most?
I'm really into big adventure games. I got hold of the latest *Zelda* game [*Twilight Princess*] and I played it to death. I literally didn't do anything else. The work just stops and I go all day. Of course, I call it research [laughs].



CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you actually want it to. Granted, a mint copy of Radiant Silvergun is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver

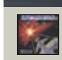
TROJAN



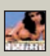
- **SYSTEM:** NES
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

SWAP SHOP

We ask our readers what they'd be willing to swap for a copy of Trojan…



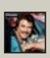
ID: Shifter My wife. I don't even own a NES, but it sure seems like a good swap to me.



ID: Bub_and_Bob For *Trojan* on the NES (or, in fact, for any retro game), I would swap my grandmother in a heartbeat! In fact, keep the game, I will send her anyway.



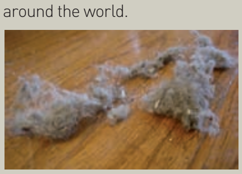
ID: Jdandiet I'd swap it for a DVD of *Virusuipisim*.



ID: Lorfarius I'd be tempted to give something in kind. Thinking long and hard about it I'd trade *Batman* just because it's too damn hard!



ID: DPrinny My collection of dust from around the world.

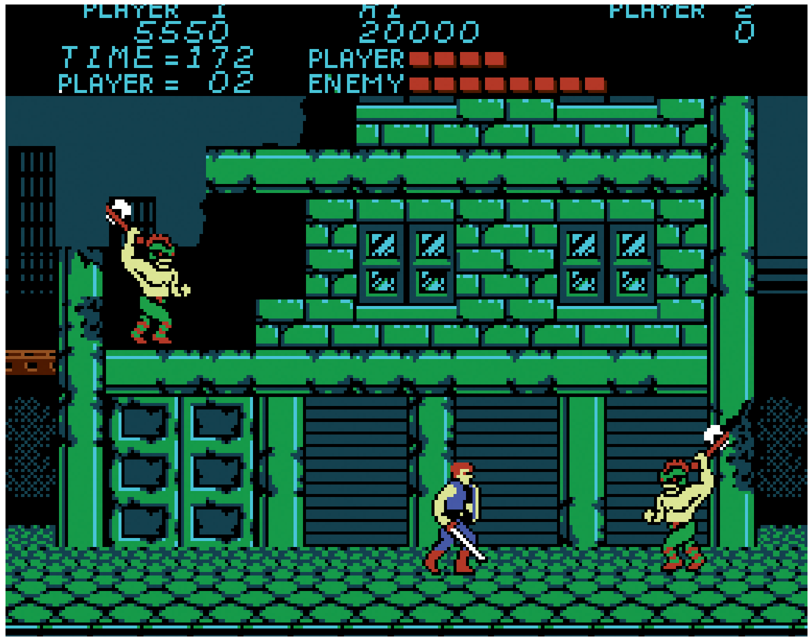


If you like your games challenging, you can't go far wrong with *Trojan*. This side-scrolling urban hack-'n'-slasher began essentially mugging players of their coffers inside arcades back in 1986. Owing to its devilish difficulty, the game comes to sit nicely alongside *Bionic Commando* for Capcom arcade missteps. It was moderately popular in arcades, and as a result was quickly ported to the NES. *Trojan*'s main boast was that it introduced a unique style to its combat – which, as far as we are aware, was first introduced in Taito's *Gladiator* (aka *Great Gurianos*, incidentally another Greek side-scrolling fighting game), where you could defend yourself from attacks using a shield that could be used in eight directions.

Starting off with that familiar map screen, the game plonks you into the leather boots of our titular hero and the action commences. Armed with sword and shield, Trojan must venture through a futuristic world besieged by demons who have resurrected an army of warriors led by the greatest skirt-wearing warrior of them all: Achilles. What with Sir Arthur in *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, and Hitler appearing as a bizarre final boss in *Bionic Commando*, Capcom clearly love sifting through the history archives to theme its characters on, and *Trojan*'s no different. It doesn't take a keen historian to work out that the game has Greek flavouring splashed all over it. Achilles, with the help of a Greek army and an armada of yachts, battled the entire Trojan army somewhere around 1250 BC. Here that battle is simply raged in a post-apocalyptic slum.

This NES port retains the arcade game's taxing challenge, but it's one of those games where practice rewards. Perseverance, learning the individual attack patterns of the bosses and becoming competent at juggling between your sword and shield is the key. The graphics also stay reasonably true to their arcade counterpart and the action feels less smothering. You also get quite a bit of control out of your main character. As well as his sword and shield, Trojan can pick up power-ups to heighten his abilities, and can be disarmed if he's struck by enemies wielding the 'Magic Ball' weapon, forcing him to continue his mission using his hands and feet.

If you liked some of the elements of the arcade original, but quickly grew annoyed at how many 10p pieces you were having to pump into its gutty and unappreciative-feeling maws, this NES port, while probably too simple in feel (although to its credit that's kind of its charm) to really be considered a true NES classic, is a worthy trade-off of three quid any day of the week.

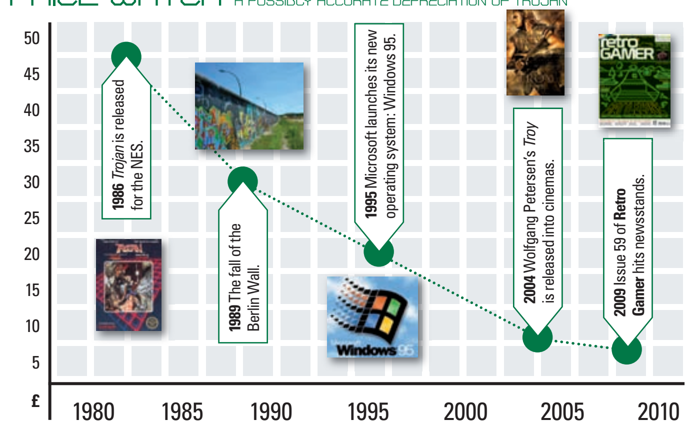


» Here our hero faces off against a pair of axe-tossing amphibian-looking luchadors. Go for the fins, Troj!



» The environments in the game aren't much to stare at, unless you're a fan of wheat.

PRICE WATCH A POSSIBLY ACCURATE DEPRECIATION OF TROJAN




BARBARIAN
00600 04 00550
DEMO
GT 65 Monitor
AMSTRAD
brightness
contrast
v-hold
power
on off
128K Colour Personal Computer
MASTER COLOUR CHA
CPC6128

AMSTRAD CPC 6128

WHEN THE AMSTRAD CPC 6128 WAS INTRODUCED IN 1985, SOME GAMERS DISMISSED IT AS A SERIOUS COMPUTER. BUT WHILE IT CERTAINLY LOOKED THE BUSINESS, BEHIND THE STRAIGHT-LACED EXTERIOR WAS A MACHINE WITH LOTS OF ADDED FUN, AS DAVID CROOKES EXPLAINS

Year released: 1985

Original price: £299 (with green-screen monitor), £399 (with colour-screen monitor)

Buy it now for: £25+

Associated magazines: Amtix, Computing With The Amstrad (later known as CPC Computing), Amstrad Computer User (official publication), Amstrad Action, CPC Attack, fanzine WACCI

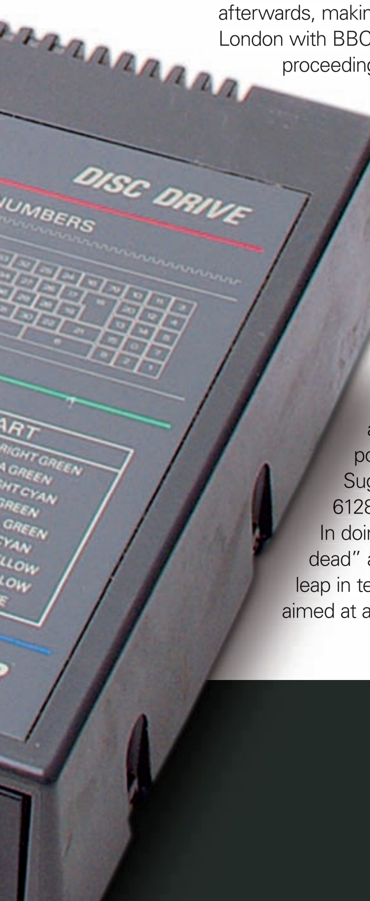
Why the CPC 6128 was great… It may not have been as cool as the Spectrum or as desirable as a Commodore 64, but the CPC 6128 was arguably the greatest 8-bit machine ever made. Adaptable (plug in a tape drive, fiddle endlessly with the volume control and you had a 464 with knobs on) and dependable, there was a mountain of games, a thriving community, and a real spirit of the underdog.



» *Amstrad CPC 464 User* magazine unveils the brand new – short-lived – 664.

Sitting atop a chunky slab of plastic, the CPC 664's white and blue keys and the clumsy-looking addition of a disk drive exuded such ugliness that you couldn't help but feel sorry for the poor sods who bought it. It was a step up from Amstrad's iconic cassette-based 464 in the sense that it added a three-inch disk drive of the like seen in the Oric Atmos, some extra BASIC commands and both the AMSDOS and CP/M 2.2 operating systems. But while it sold around 10,000 units, within five months it was replaced by the 6128 – a machine which not only doubled the memory of its predecessor but looked far sleeker, too.

And so it was that the CPC 6128 came into being. It was launched in America in 1985 and it came to Europe shortly afterwards, making its UK debut at a glitzy press conference in London with BBC newsreader Richard Whitmore overseeing proceedings. Boasting the same three-inch drive, the only real features to distinguish the 6128 from the 664 were the 128K of RAM and a better, plain white, springier keyboard. The extra memory was an important addition, however, as it was used as a RAM disk or to store data such as gaming levels. In some cases, the 128K versions of CPC games would carry sound not heard in their 64K counterparts and all of this allowed developers to give their titles a little boost from time to time.



Before its unveiling, Mr Whitmore led the assembled journalists and dealers through a potted history of Amstrad. But it was Sir Alan Sugar himself who whipped the covers off the 6128 to show his new machine in all its glory.

In doing so, he declared the 664 "well and truly dead" and he said the new arrival was due to "a leap in technology". He later stated that the 6128 was aimed at a more serious buyer, although the decision to make the machine compatible with 464 and 664 software created an instant back catalogue of games for the new machine.

"There was a simple reason for launching the CPC 6128," says Cliff Lawson, who worked on the product launch of both the 6128 and 664. "It could be produced for the same money as the 664 so Amstrad decided it would be wise to go for the better product. It offered the punter more and it was, dare I say, much prettier, too."

The 6128 was one of two computers to be unveiled by Amstrad at the same time. The other was the PCW8256, pitched mainly at businesses. That machine came with a monochrome monitor, 256K of memory, a built-in disk drive, a printer and word-processing software, but it wasn't compatible with the CPC and there was no intention of opening its appeal to gamers. The PCW retailed at £460 and, as the trumpets blared for the 6128, the 464 was cut in price, bringing its cost down to £199 for the green-screen version and £299 for colour. In some sense, it meant that the 6128 was a halfway house – part business, part pleasure – bridging the gap between the PCW and the 464.

One of the first games to take advantage of the added capacity that the extra 64K of the 6128 offered was *Sorcery+*. Released in 1985, players of this disk-based joystick-only game saw many enhancements over the original *Sorcery*, including an extra 35 screens. Amstrad loved the lush look so much that it used screens of the game in its promotional literature and yet such enhancements didn't become the norm.

Although it was possible for both 464 and 664 owners to buy a 64K memory pack, which could be inserted into an expansion slot at the back of both computers (Datel Electronics would advertise Dk'tronics' 64K memory on a monthly basis), sales were not sufficiently high enough for all developers to put in the extra effort of creating additional enhancements. The gaming benefits of purchasing extra memory were not heavily pushed either, so whether or not a game carried the extra power depended on the whim of the developer or, in some cases, the near impossibility of making a game as impressive in 64K as it would be using double that memory.

INSTANT EXPERT

The Amstrad CPC 6128 was launched in 1985 as a successor to the short-lived CPC 664, adding 128K.

It cost £399 which made it more expensive than its monitor-less rivals, the Spectum and C64. Amstrad wanted its machine to be an all-in-one solution powered with just one plug.

Although the internal drive accepted three-inch disks, it was possible to connect a second drive – either Amstrad's own three-incher, or one which accepted 3.5 or 5.25-inch disks.

The 6128 had 32K of ROM – and this contained the AMSDOS operating system and the Locomotive BASIC interpreter.

Amstrad marketed the 6128 as an all-rounder – good for programming and word processing, but equally at home with games. It was a perfect hook for kids to pester their parents.

Many 6128s therefore found themselves employed in businesses – and there was one sighting of it being used to operate a ride at Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

Educational software existed for the CPC 6128 but BBC computers dominated schools so it failed to make major inroads.

Many people hooked the 6128 to a tape deck and used the Multiface 2 to copy cassette games to disk.

As time went on, more games took advantage of the extra 64K and it came in handy for reducing loading times, too.

In 1990, the CPC 6128 was replaced by the 6128 Plus. It retained the three-inch drive but added a cartridge slot as part of a major redesign.

COMMUNITY CPC 6128 SITES TO WATCH

CPC Zone
www.cpczone.net
We've flagged up this website before, but if you want the full lowdown on anything CPC, then there is no better choice. Boasting a wonderful forum, scores of well-written reviews and lots of other goodies besides, Malc Jennings is doing a sterling job.



WinApe
www.winape.net
If you want to get back into CPC gaming or see what all the fuss is about, then you'll need to find a good emulator and there are few better than WinApe. Constantly updated, you can emulate all of the CPC models, including the 6128 and 6128 Plus.



SymbOS
www.symbos.de
For people more used to GUIs, the blue screen with yellow text that greets CPCers can be a little alien. SymbOS is a project that adds a Windows-style environment to the Amstrad and it even supports hard drives with capacity up to 128MB. Check it out.



The Amstrad CPC Games Resource
http://tacgr.emuunlim.com
Once you've got your emulator going, you'll need some games. This website is full of retro delights and, as long as you already own copies of the games you download, you'll be on safe ground. It's a popular, well-run and resourced website.



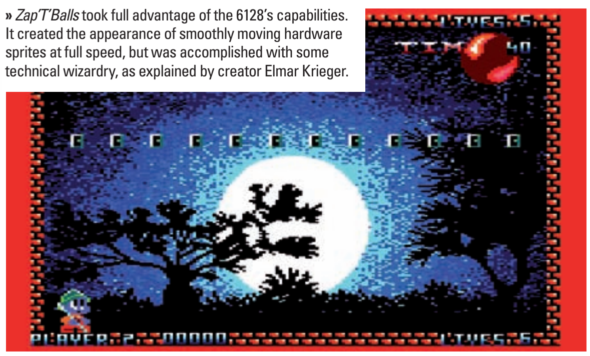


» *Prehistorik 2* worked on the 464 but there were some extra goodies on offer for 6128 owners.









» *Zap'T'Balls* took full advantage of the 6128's capabilities. It created the appearance of smoothly moving hardware sprites at full speed, but was accomplished with some technical wizardry, as explained by creator Elmar Krieger.





» The game box of *Computer Scrabble De Luxe* tells buyers the title is intended for the 6128.

TAPE AND DISK-BASED PLUS GAMES

The introduction of the three-inch disk drive with the 664 and 6128 proved to be a controversial decision at the time of its release. Amstrad seemed to adore the format, using it with its PCW range and with the Spectrum +3, despite the existence of the 5.25-inch and 3.5-inch disk formats. What annoyed people the most though was that 3.5-inch disks



held far more and became rapidly cheaper, so it was all the more surprising that Amstrad didn't scrap three-inch disks when making the move to the 6128 Plus in 1990.

"We looked at a number of storage systems including classic 5.25-inch floppy disks, three-inch floppy disks (like the 5.25-inch ones but smaller),



3.5-inch hard-case floppy disks and the three-inch hard-case disk," says Roland Perry. "At the time, the 3.5-inch disk wasn't 'IBM compatible' and it was a long time before the firm chose the format for the PS/2. So we decided to go for the three-inch disk as it was 'IBM compatible'. The three-inch disk also had the best price and performance, including our ability to commission custom-built units from an existing supplier."



Indeed, as the 6128 launched, some developers decided they wouldn't be sticking their neck out in support of the added extras of the new machine. Paula Byrne, of Melbourne House, said she would see how well the machine sold and Taskset's Paul Hodgson felt Amstrad missed an opportunity to enhance the graphics and sound chips and said he had no immediate plans to make games for it. But it wasn't all doom and gloom. Gremlin's Ian Stewart said it paved the way for better games and his company certainly made use of the new facilities on offer as the years went on.

"Amstrad didn't encourage 128K disk-based games to be produced," admits Cliff. "It wasn't particularly important since the extra memory was seen to have greater use with serious applications. The 64K games at the time worked well on the full range of Amstrad's CPC machines and it was in everyone's interest to ensure titles operated across the entire range and that the market wouldn't be split."

Around six months after launch, both the 6128 and the PCW were doing well. Amstrad announced £27.5 million half-yearly profits in April 2006 with sales in the six months to December 1985 increasing from £69 million to £128 million. The PCW8256 accounted for 20 per cent of the company's turnover, but the 6128 was becoming a market leader in France, as well as making major inroads into Germany and Spain.

Yet, for the average gamer, such corporate guff mattered little. They were more interested in enjoying some of the gems which were launched over the course of the 6128's life span. As time went on, more games arrived that could only be played with 128K of memory. They included Gremlin's *Nigel Mansell's World Championship*, one of the best Formula 1 games ever launched on the Amstrad and a title which deservedly won it much praise in the CPC gaming press.

Indeed, Gremlin, as we have discussed, liked to use the extra RAM to get the best out of its games. It produced 128K versions of *Space Crusade* and *Super Cars*. And titles such as *HeroQuest* and *Switchblade* contained music on the 6128, whereas, on an unexpanded 464, there were no tunes at all. Some differences were more subtle, however. "In *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*," explains Nicholas Campbell, the CPC Games Review webmaster, "the only difference, as far as I am aware, is that the 'handbook' (the screens displaying the car's specifications) is loaded separately on the 64K version, whereas it is included with the main game in the 128K version."

There was more… Level 9's games, including *Gnome Ranger*, *Ingrid's Back*, *Knight Orc*, *Lancelot* and *Scapeghost*, did not contain graphics on a non-enhanced 464, but the 6128 proudly showed off a host of pictures. This was also the case with *The Famous Five* as well as all four of *Magnetic Scrolls*' adventures for the CPC (*The Pawn*, *The Guild Of Thieves*, *Jinxter* and *Corruption*), which were only playable if 128K was available.

Add to that little list less prestigious titles such as *European Superleague* and *Computer Scrabble De Luxe*, throw in the likes of *Final Fight* (this game came on a dual-format disk with the Spectrum version on the other side), tag on *Gauntlet III*, *G-LOC*, *Gunboat*, and most of Microïds' later releases – *Killerball*, *Sliders* and *Swap – No Exit*, *Pirates!*, then make space for all four of Silmarils' releases (*Windsurf Willy*, *Targhan*, *Xyphoes Fantasy* and *Bunny Bricks*), *SWIV* and *Times Of Lore* and you had a pretty good reason to go for Amstrad's best machine at the time. If nothing else, the extra vocal samples on *Chase H.Q.* were probably worth the price of an upgrade alone. Well, probably anyway.

And it wasn't just disk-based games that took advantage of the extra memory. It was possible to attach a cassette deck to the 6128 and most people did, enabling a huge library of cassette games to be played. Tape titles such as *Spellbound Dizzy* provided extra graphical effects on a 6128, such as animated Yolkfolk. It was possible to see changes to the main character when he wore a snorkel and scrolls would appear in the 128K version. With some other games, including *Gryzor*, *Renegade*, *Operation Thunderbolt* and *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja*, the levels could be loaded in one go. They were stored in the additional bank of 64K.

What's more, using Romantic Robot's Multiface 2, tape-based games could be backed up to disk for easier loading and it became one of the most vital pieces of kit for the 6128, despite accusations of piracy. The device was also brilliant for those who liked to cheat. *Amstrad Action* was among the magazines to print Multiface 2 cheats that could help frustrated gamers through pretty much every title ever made.

Where the 6128 really came into its own, though, was in the final throes of its life. During the early-Nineties, programmers had truly got to grips with the CPC and there was a thriving homebrew and semi-commercial scene. Since cassettes took an age to duplicate and were more prone to error, most smaller devs released their games on disk and they also decided to make full use of the 128K available to the vast majority of CPC disk-based machines.

Games such as *Zap'T'Balls* would only work with 128K present – and those who didn't play this *Pang*-inspired jaunt were missing out on a belter. Creator Elmar Krieger explains: "In *Zap'T'Balls* the focus was on 100 per cent smooth 50fps software sprites, and this required page flipping, so two lots of 16K were needed as video memory," he says. "While the software sprites moved, the part of the background that became visible again had to be restored. Doing this fast enough required a complete third backup copy of the screen. So with 48K of 'video' memory, the remaining 16K was just not enough for music, games and so on. That's why *Zap'T'Balls* was 128K only."

Elmar also created *Prehistorik 2* and this also made extra use of the 6128's capacity, not least the addition of in-game music. "With *Prehistorik*, I was able to produce a 64K tape version for the 464 because it only used 16K of video memory, without page flipping, and the background was composed of tiles which ultimately meant there was no need for a backup of the entire screen," he says. "But I used the extra memory on the 6128 for extra effects. I went even further with the CPC+ version, creating additional parallax scrolling foreground and background graphics."

Although actual figures are not available, the 6128 was a solid seller. It fared particularly well in France, where *Iron Lord* and *B.A.T.* were produced to great fanfare. "The 6128 was a natural progression for the CPC range, especially for CP/M applications," says Roland Perry, who was Amstrad's group technical manager in 1985. "Customers demanded more RAM, even if they were not sure what it might enable them to do better."

The 6128 was only discontinued in 1990 because of the introduction of the superior 6128 Plus and yet the CPC 6128 story doesn't end at the turn of the decade. Many programmers cut their teeth on the machine, helped along, no doubt, by the brilliant 6128 manual, which didn't just show you how to turn the computer on and operate it, but also included a comprehensive guide to programming in BASIC with some handy gaming-related type-ins at the back. It's fair to say the legacy of the 6128 has continued to this very day.

"The instruction book for the 6128 was my favourite and that's not just because I wrote most of it," laughs Roland. "I had time to mature the book so that it became a 'learn how to programme' manual. The 6128 was a very stable platform for programmers and I bet we helped nurture many a games programming career. For me, that's a great legacy. I really do think that's something to be proud of."



SPECIFICATIONS

Processor: Z80A 8-bit processor (4MHz)

Memory: 128K RAM

Drive: Three-inch disk drive. Tape deck could be attached

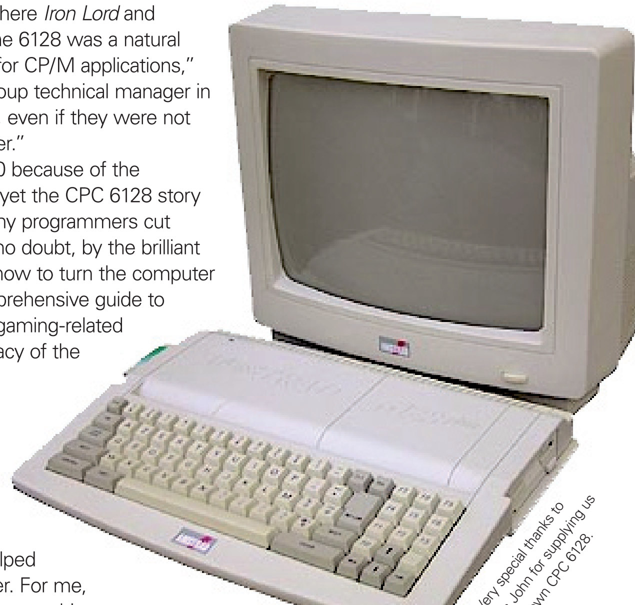
Monitor: Green screen or colour monitor

Typical resolution: 160 x 200 pixels in 16 colour Mode 0 (out of a palette of 27)

Sound: General Instrument AY-3-8912 sound chip, providing three channels



» Roland Perry oversaw the introduction of the 464, 664 and 6128 range of CPCs.



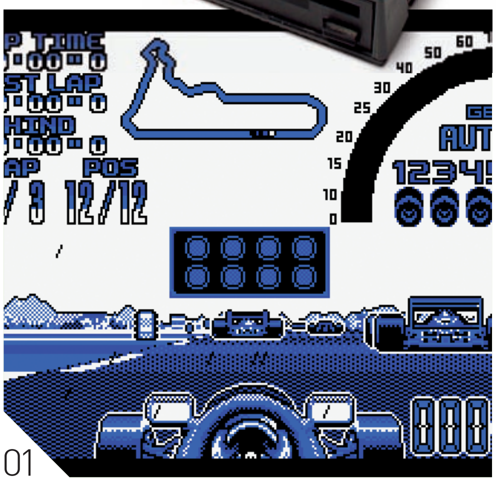
Credits: Very special thanks to reader Chris John for supplying us with his very own CPC 6128.

AMSTRAD CPC 6128



PERFECT TEN GAMES

Some games are poor. Some are great. And there are some which are wonderful and then made even better. Although the real joy came with a CPC 6128 exclusive, many games received a few tweaks here and there, improving them over their CPC 464 cousins. Here are our favourite ten CPC 6128 games…



01

NIGEL MANSELL'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SWITCHBLADE

01 **Owners of the** 464 may have disagreed, but if there was ever a game that made perfect sense on disk, then *Nigel Mansell's World Championship* was it. It was a racing game Gremlin had clearly spent time on, packing it with as many features as it could possibly fit into 128K of memory. Much of that attention was lavished on the revved-up graphics – the spinning globe, the delicious icons, Nigel's turning hands on the steering wheel – and yet it still left time to spare to ensure this was a blisteringly fast game. It filled not one but both sides of a disk and that led to lots of – seemingly random – side swapping. But it was the best example of a racing game to have ever graced the Amstrad.

CHASE H.Q.

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TOTAL RECALL

02 **If you ever** heard the words 'Let's go, Mr Driver' coming out of the tinny speaker of your CPC, then chances are you were the proud owner of a 6128. The added 64K of memory was used to deliver some cool snippets of digitised speech – with another notable inclusion being the dreaded 'Your time's up' – and such utterances will surely continue to conjure up some truly magical memories to this day. But that's not the only reason that *Chase H.Q.* on the CPC 6128 rammed the CPC 464 version off the road. The tape version of the game was a multiload and while the loading time wasn't criminal, having the disk drive in the 6128 inevitably meant that the action came considerably faster.



02

SPELLBOUND DIZZY

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **CREATED BY:** BIG RED SOFTWARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PRINCE OF THE YOLKFOLK

03 **Spellbound Dizzy was** the largest *Dizzy* game ever, with its 105 rooms making it bigger than *Magicland Dizzy* and *Fantasy World Dizzy* put together. Critics said it was too big, and, given the *Dizzy* premise of finding objects to solve puzzles, having so many in one game did prove a tad tiresome. However, for a *Dizzy* game not created by the Oliver Twins, it was full of interesting, fresh ideas. And although it came on cassette, the game made use of the 6128's extra 64K. So anyone with a 6128 and a tape drive could enjoy animated Yolkfolk, a sprite change for Dizzy when he donned a snorkel and the appearance of the scrolls.

B.A.T.

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ZOMBI

04 **Costing a whopping** £24.99 when it first arrived exclusively on disk, *B.A.T.* was a French, Orwellian-inspired, icon-driven adventure masterpiece. A game of enormous scope and size and boasting some of the best visuals of any CPC game ever made, what it lacked in sound – there was not a peep – it more than made up for with its challenge. Little surprise then that the manual was so incredibly detailed. It was akin to a small novel and it lent the title great depth. To do this game justice meant Ubisoft simply had to utilise 128K and it had to go for a disk. Fortunately, disks were more popular in France, where this game really excelled.

ZAP'T'BALLS

» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **PUBLISHER:** CPC AMSTRAD INTERNATIONAL
» **CREATED BY:** ELMSOFT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PREHISTORIK 2

05 **The main article** has already discussed why *Zap'T'Balls* wasn't released as a 64K, tape version. But even though it was made for the machine, not every 6128 owner could play it. Much of it depended on the type of CRTC chip in the computer. Elmar Krieger, who made the game exclusively for the CPC, said some disk drives had problems loading it too and he found the 6128 Plus appeared to run in to the most trouble. For those who got it to work, it was sparkling from the very moment the demo-inspired loading sequence sprung into action to the last pop of a balloon.



03



04



05



06



07



08

EVE OF SHADOWS

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHER:** ADVENTURE PD
- » **CREATED BY:** ROB BUCKLEY
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FLUFF

06 **Three things could** put you off this game: it was written in BASIC, it only cost a quid or so to buy and it was never playtested. But the odd spelling mistake here and there and the preconception that cheap must equal bad, especially when combined with a rather primitive program language didn't hamper *Eve Of Shadows* one bit. It made full use of the 128K and drive of the 6128, loading the text and graphics straight from the disk, to free up the memory for the actual code. That made *Eve* a sizeable text adventure, but it was also one that oozed professionalism. Sending a quid, disk and SAE for this back in 1991 was a wise move.

SORCERY+

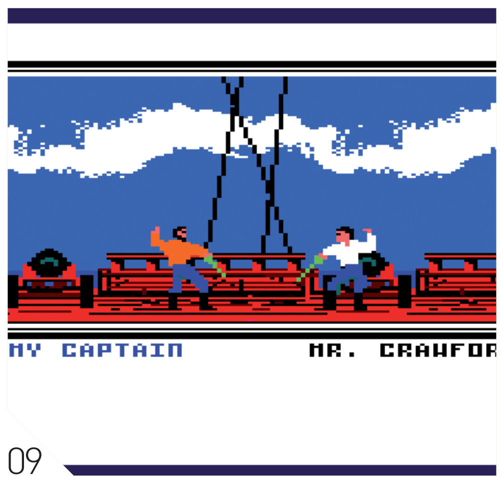
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DAN DARE

07 **Sorcery was originally** released on tape, but, to take advantage of the 6128, Virgin launched *Sorcery+*, adding an extra 35 screens to the 40 that were already on the cassette version. This was made possible via the fast loading of the screens from disk. It let the developer pack in lots of other extras, too – including scrolling messages and demo modes – and such was its success (*Amstrad Action* awarded it 91%, handing the original 90%), that it was seen as the start of a bright disk-based 128K future. It didn't quite work out like that since not all games made use of the extra 64K, but it was a noble effort, that's for sure.

IRON LORD

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** EXIT

08 **Ubisoft was a** master of CPC design in the early-Nineties and, along with *B.A.T., Iron Lord* was one of the undoubted classics from its French stable. Artistic in looks, medieval in atmosphere, *Iron Lord* became a firm and unique favourite of the swords-and-sorcery genre. It employed a multiple-choice interface and was joystick operated and that worked wonderfully in sucking players in. It was also chock-full with sub-plots. Like *B.A.T., Iron Lord* was disk-only and expensive (£19.99), but for that price you could spend hours submerged in the game's involving quests and feasting your eyes on illustrations that could have come straight out of a children's storybook.



09

PIRATES!

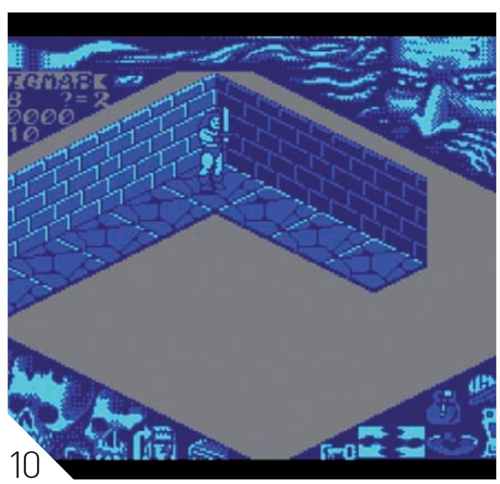
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GUNSHIP

09 **Although a lot** of 128K-only games would run on a 464 or 664 with a disk drive and 64K added, Sid Meier's *Pirates!* was a little bit different. It only worked with a straightforward 6128 and no amount of jiggery pokery would alter that. It was a shame for other CPC owners because it was such a brilliant game, but then it did come on both sides of the disk and with a lengthy manual inside the box packed full of information. While the graphics were chunky and the sound effects were poor, there was a quality to this MicroProse game that was rarely seen. Sure, at £19.95, it was rather expensive, especially when you think that it was released in 1987, but it was definitely one not to have been missed.

HEROQUEST

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE

10 **Sometimes it's the** small things which make a difference. That was certainly the case with *HeroQuest*, a game that thrilled fans of role-playing games and which came in two distinct flavours: 64K and 128K. What marked the latter was its wonderful sound or music, to be exact. The medieval soundtrack was a joy to hear on the CPC 6128 and it brilliantly complemented the detailed, smooth visuals. It turned out to be one of the best games on the Amstrad in 1991, which is a massive compliment since it was something of a golden year for the machine. That it went down so well with critics and fans alike must have been music to Gremlin's ears.



10

AMSTRAD CPC 6128

and the rest…

Sadly, the CPC 6128 didn't feature many games that took advantage of its more powerful technology. Good job it was backwards compatible with the CPC 464 back catalogue then. Here are a few of the highlights…



01 PRINCE OF PERSIA
01 1942
03 HEAD OVER HEELS
04 RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II
05 BARBARIAN
06 POWER DRIFT
07 FEUD
08 TARGET: RENEGADE
09 IKARI WARRIORS
10 TOTAL ECLIPSE
11 ALIEN 8
12 GAME OVER
13 JET SET WILLY
14 SPACE HARRIER
15 BACTRON
16 DEATH WISH 3
17 KUNG-FU MASTER
18 SHOCKWAY RIDER
19 RICK DANGEROUS
20 KANE
21 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
22 SPINDIZZY
23 GHOSTBUSTERS
24 KNIGHT LORE
25 STORMLORD
26 THUNDERCATS
27 THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD
28 CHASE H.Q.
29 DRILLER
30 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
31 INSIDE OUTING
32 NEBULUS
33 RAINBOW ISLANDS
34 CYBERNOID
35 GRYZOR
36 TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES
37 FREDDY HARVEST
38 RAMPAGE
39 WARLOCK
40 SORCERY+
41 GUNFRIGHT
42 PLATOON
43 STAR WARS
44 JACK THE NIPPER
45 ROBOCOP
46 IK+
47 SOLOMON'S KEY
48 BATMAN
49 OPERATION WOLF
50 CASTLE MASTER
51 KARNOV
52 VINDICATORS
53 PIPE MANIA
54 CAULDRON II
55 SAVAGE
56 GAUNTLET II



04 05 06 07 11 12 13 14 18 19 20 21 25 26 27 28 32 33 34 35 39 40 41 42 46 47 48 49 53 54 55 56



FINAL FIGHT 3

IT'S THIRD TIME LUCKY FOR CAPCOM



- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20-30



HISTORY

Okay, hands up everybody who was disappointed by *Final Fight* on the SNES? I'm expecting everyone who bought the game to have their arms in the air.

Basically, if you wanted to own a kind of complete, but co-op-lacking version of Capcom's side-scrolling brawler on your SNES you would have to buy the original *Final Fight*, which featured the characters Cody and Haggar, but lacks Guy, and then fork out another 50 or so quid to purchase *Final Fight Guy* on import, which added Guy and then pointlessly omitted Cody.

There's no reason for Capcom's cynical mistreatment of *Final Fight*, and to make matters worse it made no effort to rectify things with its SNES-exclusive sequel either.

Final Fight 3, however, despite a few issues, is by far the best of the three-and-a-half game series. Never released in PAL territories, *Final Fight 3* (released under the misleading title of *Final Fight Tough* in Japan) proved to be a vast improvement over its predecessors.

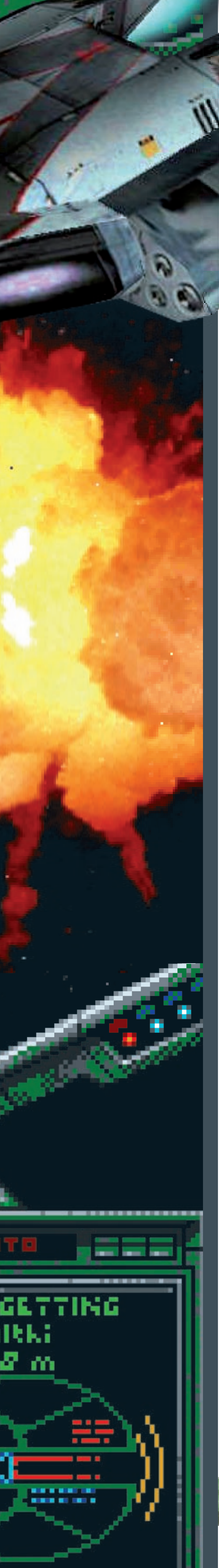
After the Mad Gear Gang's reign of terror is brought to a violent end by Maki, Carlos and Haggar, a new gang emerges and quickly begins terrorising Metro City. This time, fan favourites Haggar and Guy return to the fight, although Maki, Carlos and Cody are seemingly nonplussed by it all. We're also introduced to two new faces – police officer Lucia, and Dean, who resembles Super Joe from *Bionic Commando*.

Capcom also attempted to right a few wrongs by adding an auto co-op option. This mode allowed your SNES to battle through the game, with you controlling the second character, and blessed each player with a dirge of moves and a super bar, and then served up hordes of new enemies for you to test your new moves out on.

Although none of the *Final Fight* games to appear on the SNES have ever really been much good, if you're a fan of the *Final Fight* series, then this one is certainly the one worth seeking out. It's not exceptional by any stretch of the imagination, but at least Capcom seemed to be having a pretty good stab.


TIME
LUCIA
000041700
95
x4
SUPER


EJECT
EJECT
KPS 350
SET 410
BLASTER
LOCK
WEAPON DISPLAY
Weapon: None
Gun: Laser cannon



The History Of Wing Commander

SOME GAMES FOLLOW THE INDUSTRY, SOME INFLUENCE IT, AND SOME GRAB THE BULL BY THE HORNS AND RIDE IT OFF INTO THE DISTANCE. VERY FEW, HOWEVER, PUSHED THAT BULL AS FAR AS THE WING COMMANDER SERIES DID. PAUL HARRISON REMEMBERS THE RIDE...

Today, the *Wing Commander* series stands as one of those games without which the industry would not be where it is. The series' continual pushing on technological boundaries furthered PC gaming much in the same way as *Mario* pushed the consoles. Every game Chris Roberts created in some way stood out from the crowd, and insured the series an eternal fame. This is the hindsight. In 1990, with the release of *Wing Commander,* the series stood where all other first games stand: on a shelf with a possibility of being bought and a much smaller possibility of being remembered.

The one thing the first game in the series had to stand it out from the crowd was a name: Origin. A well-known and very well-respected developer, Origin was the company behind the legendary RPG series *Ultima*. With *Ultima VI* having just been released, *Wing Commander* had a means to meet its first challenge, to simply be sold, and was publicised with the line 'From the Creators of Ultima' on the box cover. Doubtlessly the line gave *Wing Commander* a certain amount of attention in the first instance, but what *Wing Commander* did with that attention came down to its own merits. Its memory was crafted from its own hands.

As Chris Roberts, designer, writer and programmer of *Wing Commander* states, inspiration for the game came from outside of the industry itself. "*Wing Commander I* was more inspired by the films and historical references to World War II than any particular game. The goal was to create a game with the same sense of immersion and world that I felt when watching *Star Wars* or *Battlestar Galactica* (the original one)." So it was that *Wing Commander* set players as an unnamed rookie pilot – who would become referred to, rather self-explanatorily, as Blue Hair – who'd fly into combat off of the TCS Tiger's Claw to defend mankind from the Kilrathi. Where *Wing Commander* was set apart was in the complexity of these battles. The Kilrathi were unpredictable and completing missions and staying alive was a real challenge. As Chris explains, the battles were based on real life. "*The Forever War* by Joe Haldeman (a novel which, though set in space, is noted for Haldeman's realistic portrayal of his service in Vietnam) was one inspiration, as were the naval air battles from the war in the Pacific." Fans, however, more commonly liken the battles to that legendary film, *Star Wars*. "It's funny," says Chris, "as Lucas used World War II dogfights as a template for his X-wing battles in *Star Wars* and *Wing Commander* used the War in the Pacific as a template for the battles between the Kilrathi (the Imperial Japanese forces, complete with the warrior bushido code) and the Confederation (the US Pacific forces)."

> **"Elite opened my eyes to the possibilities of where I could go"** Chris on his influences

Though the predominant influence in the creation of *Wing Commander* came from outside the industry, no game production can truly say it hasn't been inspired by, or at least that its research hasn't taken into account, those that went before. Chris confirms: "If I were going to point to two games that inspired *Wing Commander*, the first would be *Elite* for the BBC Micro, as it was the first space game in which I piloted a ship in combat, and it opened my eyes to the possibilities of where I could go." *Elite* was a rather basic game, the ships being rendered in 3D with no cinematic presentation, but, as Chris recalls, "it got me thinking about taking a 'space sim' and presenting it like a film." The second game Chris points to is Lucasfilm Games' *Battlehawks 1942*, which Chris remembers "opened my eyes to using pre-rendered views of a plane in order to achieve a more detailed image of the spaceship than flat-shaded 3D rendering."

The realism of *Wing Commander*, along with its high-quality gameplay, made it a major commercial success. Games developers themselves are often their own harshest critics, but, as Chris states: "I can honestly say that *Wing Commander I* is the only game I've made that I wouldn't change a thing about, even in hindsight!" Sales suggest that fans agreed.

WING COMMANDER CHARACTERS



Jeannette 'Angel' Devereaux (2626-2669)

The cool-headed and rational human Colonel Jeannette Devereaux, callsign 'Angel', was a native of Belgium and starfighter pilot for the Terran Confederation, fighting in the Vega and Enigma Sector campaigns and working in Special Operations throughout the Kilrathi War. Her first appearance was in *Wing Commander*. She was played by Yolonda Jilot in *Wing Commander III: Heart Of The Tiger* and by Saffron Burrows in the *Wing Commander* movie.



Mariko 'Spirit' Tanaka (Unknown-2666)

The human Mariko Tanaka, callsign 'Spirit', is a fantastic pilot who took the post of Christopher 'Maverick' Blair's wingman during the Kilrathi War. Born in Sapparo, Japan from a bloodline of strong warriors, Mariko joined the Terran Confederation during the Terran/Kilrathi War and went on to earn the rank of Lieutenant. Her first appearance was in *Wing Commander*. She died, shortly after transferring to the TCS Concordia, when she intentionally crashed her ship into the station holding her fiancé Philip.



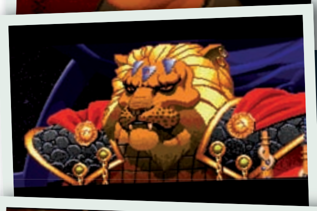
Michael 'Iceman' Casey (2623-2656)

The human Michael Casey, codename 'Iceman', was a phenomenal pilot who played as Christopher 'Maverick' Blair's wingman sporadically during the Kilrathi War and earned the rank of Major. His wife and baby daughter were killed in a Kilrathi raid on Vega VII, leaving his other daughter Julia prisoner. After avenging the murders of his wife and baby daughter with 360 Kilrathi kills, he was killed in action himself in the B'shriss system.



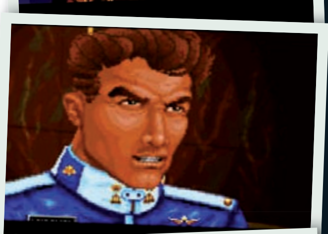
Kien 'Bossman' Chen (2615-2655)

Kien Chen, callsign 'Bossman', from Taiwan, Earth, was a pilot for the Terran Confederation from 2637. He was assigned to Major of the TCS Tiger's Claw for his exemplary leadership in combat. First appearing in *Wing Commander*, he was killed in action on a patrol on 2655.271 by the Kilrathi Imperial Guard.



Thrakhath nar Kiranka (2624-2669)

Thrakhath nar Kiranka, Crown Prince of the Kilrathi, was the youngest of the sons of Gilkarg nar Kiranka – son of the Kiranka Emperor and third in line to the throne. Thrakhath was the chief enemy of the Terran Confederation during the Kilrathi War. First appearing in *Wing Commander* he was killed by Colonel Christopher Blair on 2669.267, shortly before the destruction of his home planet.



Zachary 'Jazz' Colson (2622-2667)

The human Zachary Colson, callsign 'Jazz', began his career as a novice pilot on the TCS Austin on which he also played music, hence being given his callsign, and went on to earn the rank of Major. He first appeared in the *Secret Missions* of *Wing Commander I*, an experience which left him cold and hate filled as Christopher Blair's actions resulted in the heartfelt loss of the Goddard Colony.



Geoffrey Tolwyn (2613-2673)

The human Space Marshal Geoffrey Tolwyn is one of the most controversial leaders in the galaxy. Born into an upper-class English family from a long line of distinguished soldiers, Tolwyn went on to become one of the chief heroes in the war against the Kilrathi, as seen in his first appearance, in *Wing Commander II*, before shockingly betraying all that had been so dear to him and being put on trial for 'crimes against humanity' in his final appearance, in *Wing Commander IV*.



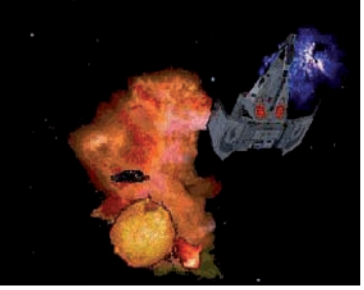
» The game that started it all had none of the technological gems of its offspring, its success came down to pure playability bliss.

"I thought if it sold 100,000 copies it would be a great success. We did that in the first month!"

The success of the first game insured a top-end production on the second. As Chris explains: "When you know you have a success it is always easy to open the purse strings up for the next version." What did this allow for *Wing Commander II: Vengeance Of The Kilrathi*? "More graphics, a bigger team and voice recording."

It is often the case in games, as with everything else, that success on the first outing results in a blasé attitude to the second as too much reliance is placed on fans' expectations, which usually go unmet. With *Wing Commander*, this was never the case. Not only did *Wing Commander II* meet fans' expectations, it surpassed them, with drastic improvements in gameplay and an even more intricate and involving story, but it was the latter attribute that truly set the series apart. "I think *Wing Commander* was always about the characters," says Chris, expressing an attitude that is a rarity in games even these days, and was especially rare in the Nineties. Games still fight for quality writing, which more often than not is set back by the marketing department's belief that a quality script is superfluous to the market. *Wing Commander* is one of very few games to break that mould. "From the very beginning the vision was to have a collection of interesting characters/pilots, each with unique personalities and flying styles, like in the real world (or at least in a cool movie)," says Chris. It was *Wing Commander II* that truly began to express this vision. "*Wing Commander II* is probably my favourite, as it was the first one to take the structure of what *Wing Commander* presented and turn it into a proper space soap opera, with Blair's fall from grace, his redemption and burgeoning relationship with Angel."

Wing Commander II wasted no time in pulling its storytelling strings. The game opens with a squadron of cloaked Kilrathi bombers laying waste to the Tiger's Claw, the ship that was Blue Hair's home throughout the first game. Blue Hair is then swiftly court-martialled by





» Here we have it. The absolute high point of the entire history of videogames. A porn star in space. Truly, we gamers are kings among men.



» An example of *Wing Commander III*'s mature storytelling, one of so many unique attributes of the series.



» *Privateer* offered gamers an open world in which they could play the good guys, the bad guys, or the guys who simply didn't give a damn either way.



"I thought if it sold 100,000 copies it would be a great success. We did that in the first month!" Chris on Wing Commander I's great success

disbelieving authorities and reduced to running security patrols for ten years. His reputation is restored when he meets a group of survivors from the Tiger's Claw, but, in a tool for playability, he must work his way up through the ranks once more, an objective greatly helped when he destroys those fighters he swore had laid waste to the Tiger's Claw in the first place. Though the writing in the first two games wasn't to par with that of the next two, due to being written in-house, from this synopsis alone it is clear it went beyond the average writing in games, as did the deliverance of that story, with the use of one of the series' many innovations: voice. "Voice acting in *Wing Commander II* came about because this new company had sent us a new card they wanted to launch called the 'Soundblaster' and we went, 'Hmmm, wouldn't it be fun to hear people instead of reading subtitles?'" Chris recalls. "Back then we didn't have any fancy sound-recording stages or even actors. It was the development team pitching in as the voices of the characters." Even with these rudimentary techniques, the simple fact of having voice in games was a major breakthrough.

Having created two games that truly pushed PC gaming, it was time for a break. Enter *Wing Commander Academy*, a humble game that rid itself of the extensive plot and instead put control in the player's hands in what was a customisable dogfight simulator. Choose your fighter, your enemy's fighter, and enter combat: simple. *Academy*'s only real link to the series' story was the vague notion that gamers were Confederation pilots in training. It's hard to think that *Academy* really constituted a game in its own right though. The technology was all *Wing Commander II*, as were the vessels, the gameplay and, well, everything else.

Where *Academy* was a nice little pit stop on the intergalactic journey, *Wing Commander: Privateer* was a whole new galaxy, setting players as a mercenary, not fighting for good as in the main series, nor for bad, but simply for oneself, and, while the main series dabbled with open-ended dialogue, *Privateer* was completely open-ended. True, there was a story, but the player could, and often did, completely ignore it. The real fun of *Privateer* was in taking on the missions you wanted to – which ranged from transportation to attacks – and trading ships. This nature of gameplay meant that every playthrough had its own unique feel as player choices might result in the Kilrathi coming after you or, in breaking the law, the Confederation bearing justice upon ye'. *Privateer* would later be sold with a speech-accessory pack, and later still the add-on *Righteous Fire* would be released, offering new technologies for those gaming perfectionists.

One last detour en route to our biggest thrill yet saw us stop at the port known as *Wing Commander: Armada*, a port that ended up going nowhere, but at least dared to dream. Gameplay took the form of an all-out multiplayer that, in RTS form, had players mining planets for resources with which to build their fleet. While a new graphics engine gave it an alternative look, which was aided by new ships, the gameplay was the main innovation, so much so that many believe *Armada* was overly ambitious and that the chief reason for its failure was simply that it deviated too wildly from its siblings. Either way, it left fans with a longing to see the series they had come to love restored to its former self. It never was. Instead, it was revolutionised.

Go back 13 years to 1995, say to any games fan, 'You'll be able to play as Luke Skywalker in the next *Wing Commander*,' and watch their astonished jaws drop. As Chris beams, "Who didn't want to be Luke Skywalker when they were a kid?" Of course, *Wing Commander* was never a *Star Wars* rip-off, nor did it need Hamill's publicity to bring sales. Nevertheless, Hamill obviously brought a high level of attention to the title.

Where Hamill may have been cast for his celebrity, all other cast members were required to take a more traditional approach. "The rest of the cast were picked for how well they portrayed the various characters," says Chris. "We did the whole casting thing out in Los Angeles, using a big-time casting director, Mike Fenton (who had cast a

MONITOR TO MOVIE SCREEN

Since the release of *Wing Commander III: Heart Of The Tiger*, Chris Roberts had stated that he wanted to produce movies. He found success five years later with *Wing Commander* (the movie). It begins one month before the start of the first game, with Christopher Blair and Todd Marshall arriving as young pilots aboard the Tiger's Claw. Here they take part in a suicidal mission as the Tiger's Claw draws Kilrathi fighters away from Earth.

Freddie Prinze Jr starred alongside Matthew Lillard, Saffron Burrows and David Warner in what turned into a financial disaster, returning a mere $11.5 million in the US from a budget of $30 million. Even fans of the games criticised the movie for its depiction of the *Wing Commander* universe, which was so poorly portrayed that even the actors did not look like the characters they were playing. Another classic example of a great game being turned into a poor film.

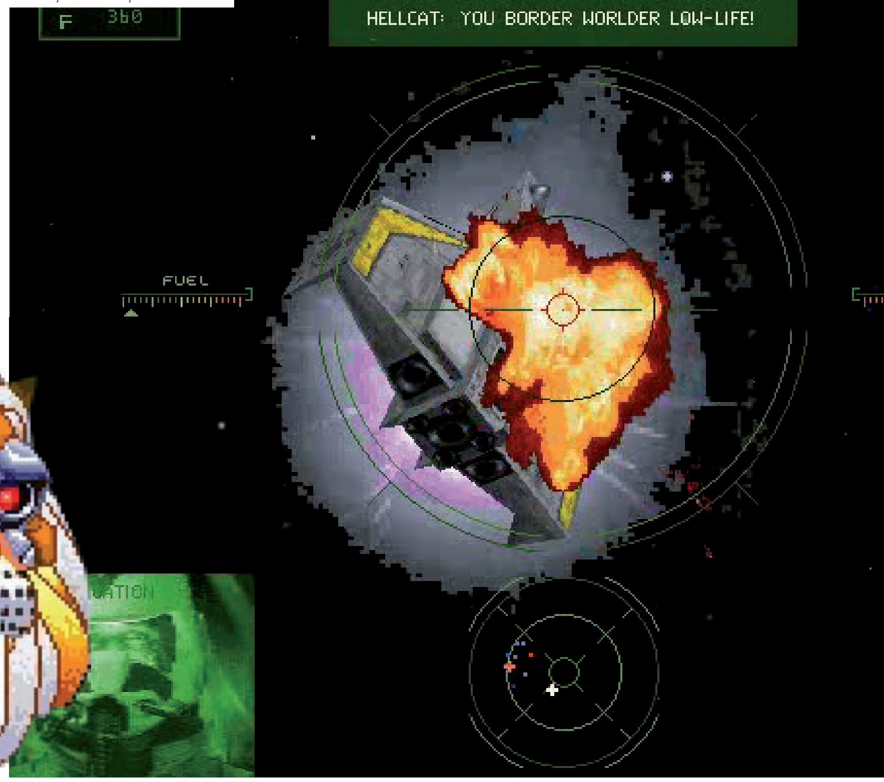


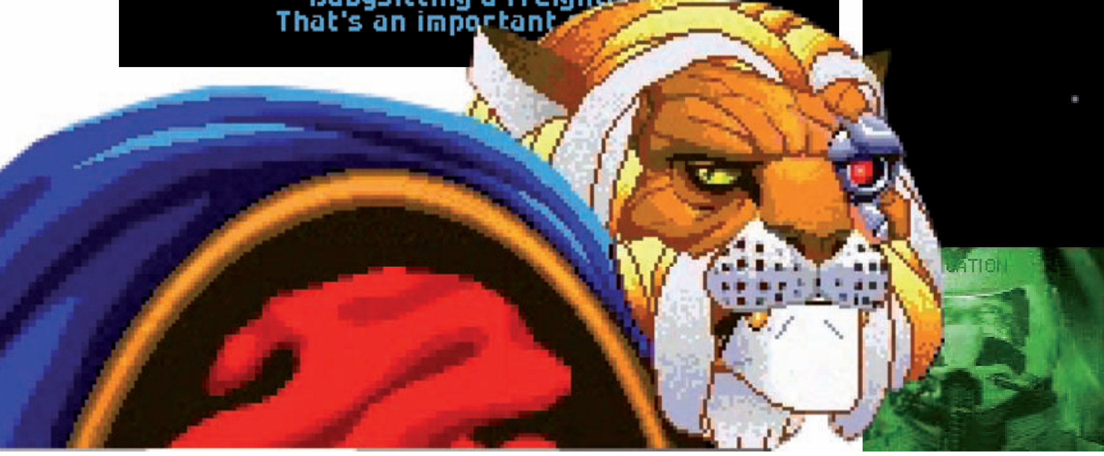


» As Chris Roberts explained, no matter how excellent the graphics and story may be, it is impossible to get the same empathy from cartoons that can be achieved with real actors.



» It may have disappointed a number of fans, but *Wing Commander IV* certainly looked the part.





THE ACADEMY

Produced by Universal Cartoon Studios, with a team under the guidance of Larry Latham (who also directed the *Pac-Man* series), *Wing Commander Academy* served, much like the movie, as a loose prequel to *Wing Commander*, showing the early days of the Terran/Kilrathi War. The show was short-lived, with 13 episodes carrying it from 21 September 1996 to 21 December the very same year, but managed, at least, to avoid the slings and arrows of fans that had criticised the movie. Where the movie was alien to the games, the cartoon featured several similarities. First of all, Mark 'Luke Skywalker' Hamill led the cast along with fellow *Wing Commander* actors Malcolm McDowell and Tom Wilson, and the show featured many of the ships from the games, including the Scimitar, Broadswords, and the Tiger's Claw.

lot of Spielberg's films)." The result was a healthy mix of talented stars, including Malcolm McDowell of *A Clockwork Orange*, John Rhys-Davies, who recently played Gimli in the *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, and, in yet another first for the industry, a porn star! "I guess people felt that we had cynically cast [porn star] Ginger Lynn Allen as more than one gamer wouldn't mind kissing her, but I can't claim to be so smart!"

It is no secret that Hollywood is rife with pomposity. Doubtlessly, some of Hollywood's key players must have snorted at the idea of appearing in a game. Without a few big names to back it up, the film's production could easily have been sidelined as a superfluous experiment. Thankfully, the actors that came on board gave the production the professionalism it deserved and, in turn, gave credibility, not just to *Wing Commander III*, but to the very idea of using film in games. "The cast were intrigued. Back in 1994 this was the cutting edge," says Chris. "Hardly anyone had done it. I think *Wing Commander III* was one of the first games to really legitimise videogames in the eyes of the film business."

Not only was the casting process the same as that of Hollywood, so too was the actual film production. "We shot *Wing Commander III* very much the same way *Sin City* was shot, but we did it ten years earlier. In fact, some of the artists that helped Robert Rodriguez find his look and technique for *Sin City* were the very same artists that worked on *Wing Commander III*. We shot against a greenscreen (as the uniforms were mostly blue) on a soundstage in Los Angeles, with our artists compositing in the backgrounds and environments (which they had built and rendered in 3D). Other than that, the way the actors were shot and directed was very much like TV or film, with the exception that we usually filmed multiple versions of a scene, depending on which way the Chris Blair character took the conversation." Even the script itself was produced as a verbatim of Hollywood. "For *Wing Commander III* and *IV* we hired actual film screenwriters," states Chris. "Those games were based on story ideas I had which the writers turned into very good and dense scripts."

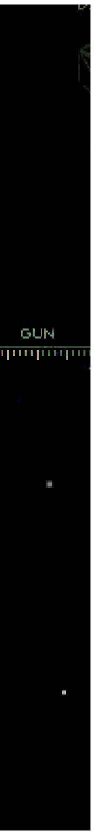
The use of actors and film captured that essence that Chris had been seeking all along: emotional attachment and the soap-opera feel. "There's a realism of emotion that is missing from animation," Chris explains. "Even today's work, which has much more fidelity and detail, [can't capture the same feeling]. Even with all the money and time spent on something like *Beowulf* (the animated film) there's still something that prevents us from truly sympathising and feeling the emotion the way we would with a flesh and blood actor."

In the same way *Wing Commander II* had necessitated fans to buy sound cards, *Wing Commander III* had them buying CD-ROMs and 486 processors. The trade was a worthwhile one. Where previous games in the series had used pre-rendered images for the ships, resulting in choppy animation, *Wing Commander III*'s use of the

> **"Some of the artists that helped Robert Rodriguez find his look for Sin City worked on Wing Commander III"** Chris on the look of Wing Commander III









polygonal Super VGA graphics engine created strikingly realistic effects and gave a unique feel to the game while allowing gameplay and plot to remain true to its predecessors. While many fans found the innovations of *Wing Commander III* to actually detract from the game with the grainy film segments and somewhat heavy-handed story, the game's innovative nature went beyond subjectivity. It changed the course of gaming to this day. Naturally, the entire industry was tingling with anticipation for the series' fourth outing.

What could Chris Roberts do with *Wing Commander IV*? Pretty much anything. The budget for the game was $10 million, the same amount that was spent on *Star Wars*. What he chose to do with it would end up being prophetic. Since *Wing Commander III*, Chris had stated that he wanted to work in movies. The direction he took on *Wing Commander IV* confirmed this. "Most of the $10 million went to upgrading the storytelling and live action, as initially EA wanted the game out in 12 months, so that ruled out a lot of new technology development in terms of the 3D engine. We shot on film as opposed to video and used mostly real sets (as opposed to virtual ones), had a lot more days to shoot (42 days versus 25) and had a lot more scenes than *Wing Commander III*." This marks Chris's first break away from gaming, for where the third game was an innovation that actually benefited the title in terms of gaming, the fourth was, for many, superficial. While *Wing Commander III* had proven that good writing in games benefits the gameplay, gaming has never been about the writing. Even these days, with the likes of *BioShock*, we are only just starting to see writing take a prominent position in games, but that has never, nor should ever, be at the expense of gameplay. Though, for Chris, story had always come first, he had always made sure to push the gaming elements equally to the writing. With *Wing Commander IV*, this all changed. "The script was over twice the size of the *Wing Commander III* one. As we were constrained on time and research and development we really focused on the storytelling and characters

WHEN WE'RE NOT ACTING

The real-life faces of the Wing Commander series



Mark Hamill

What can be said about Mark Hamill? He's Luke Skywalker. As stated by Chris Roberts, one of the key intentions of the *Wing Commander* series was to give an interactive feel to movies like *Star Wars*. What could help that aim more than setting Hamill himself as the series' lead character Christopher Blair? His appearance instantly brought back those memories of X-wings fighting TIE fighters above a certain Deathstar, and with those memories came the thrill of thinking we could all be Jedi.

Malcolm McDowell

Born in Leeds in 1943, McDowell's acting career has spanned over four decades. He's been involved in numerous high-quality movies, including *A Clockwork Orange*, *O Lucky Man!* and *Metalocalypse*. Perhaps his most notorious contribution to film among *Wing Commander* fans, is his role as Dr Tolian Soran, the man who killed Captain Kirk in *Star Trek: Generations*. His work in videogames includes appearances in *Champions Of Norrath: Realms Of EverQuest*, *Star Trek: Generations* and as the voice of President John Henry Eden in *Fallout 3*. He played Admiral Tolwyn in the *Wing Commander* series.

Ginger Lynn Allen

Perhaps the most talented actress in the entire *Wing Commander* series, Ginger Lynn Allen was rated the seventh greatest performer of all time… by the Adult Video News for her work in porn in the Eighties, a career that, ironically, finished after 69 productions. In an attempt to explain her casting as Rachel in *Wing Commander III*, Chris Roberts states: "She had the best audition and got the role on those merits – it was only after this that someone said to me, 'Do you know what she used to do?'"

Tom Wilson

An interesting and very talented artist, Tom Wilson has studied politics at Arizona State University, is a painter, voiceover artist, musician, writer, comedian and, of course, actor. He is best known for playing – and rather brilliantly it must be said – the bully in the *Back To The Future* trilogy, Biff. He has made an eclectic contribution to animated productions, including roles in *Batman: The Animated Series*, *The New Batman Adventures*, Disney's *Atlantis: Milo's Return* and *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*. He played Major Todd 'Maniac' Marshall in the *Wing Commander* series.

John Rhys-Davies

Born in 1944 in Salisbury, Wiltshire, England, John Rhys-Davies is arguably the most commercially successful actor in the whole of the *Wing Commander* series. Not only has he recently shot to the absolute top of his career by playing that loveable dwarf Gimli – along with being the voice of Treebeard – in the *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, he has also acted in the *Indiana Jones* trilogy as the Arabian excavator Sallah, as General Leonid Pushkin in the James Bond film *The Living Daylights*, and Macro in *I, Claudius*. His videogame work includes *Lords Of EverQuest*, *Freelancer*, *Forgotten Realms: Baldur's Gate – Dark Alliance* and *Dune 2000*. He played James 'Paladin' Taggart in the *Wing Commander* series.

Josh Lucas

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1971, Lucas grew up travelling around the south of America with his parents. By the age of 13 he had lived in 30 different areas. He moved to Hollywood at the age of 19 to begin pursuing his acting career. His role as Jace 'Flash' Dillon in *Wing Commander III: Heart Of The Tiger* was his first feature role. It would take over a decade of acting, with startling performances in *Alive*, *You Can Count On Me* and *The Deep End*, before Lucas would find stardom with his high-profile roles in *A Beautiful Mind*, *Sweet Home Alabama* and *The Hulk*. His work in *Wing Commander III* constitutes his only involvement in the videogame industry.









» Where *Wing Commander III* had used storytelling to advance the game's immersion, *Wing Commander IV* suffered by being more movie than game.



for *Wing Commander IV*. As a result, I think the story is a lot more nuanced and, for a computer game, I think explores some ideas that you wouldn't normally expect to." In hindsight, Chris admits, "I wish we had more time on *Wing Commander IV* to work on the tech and gameplay side. The original mandate was to ship the game in 12 months. In the end it took 15 months from start to finish, but that's still a miracle given that most triple-A games now take four to five years. Having such a short development cycle really precluded us from pushing the gameplay side and exploring new tech to make the game even more immersive."

Many fans of the series believe that the fourth game was actually a retrograde of the third.

There were no real technological advancements in terms of the game – which used the same engine as its predecessor – save for the slight improvements in image quality on the FMVs; and the cockpit graphics that had given a distinctive, embracing feel to play, were removed to allow for higher frame rates and improved visibility.

Perhaps Chris saw the irony of the title *Wing Commander IV: The Price Of Freedom*, for finding his own freedom to move into movie production cost many fans a heavy price. It is a crying shame that the career of one of gaming's most inspirational figures had to come to a halt with something of a disappointment, but then, the tides were changing.

With Chris Roberts stepping aside, the continuation of *Wing Commander* was left to his brother Erin, though, whether the game Erin actually released in 1997 constitutes a part of the *Wing Commander* series is somewhat open to debate. *Privateer 2: The*



» The Kilrathi realised humanity might have a use after all, after watching Ginger Lynn Allen's previous productions.

Darkening bore no direct relation to the *Wing Commander* series, save for its theme. It was neither set in the *Wing Commander* universe, nor did it share too much of its gameplay. The result of this was a decline in sales as many fans of *Wing Commander* didn't feel it necessary to buy *Privateer 2* for the sense of the series' completion. Nevertheless, the game was rife with its fair share of quality moments. Big budget FMV sequences that starred the likes of John Hurt and Christopher Walken, along with a new space-combat engine that far outshone *Wing Commander IV*, made *Privateer 2* worthy of a purchase whether it be considered a *Wing Commander* game or not. Fair enough, critics will cite that the initial release carried with it a plentiful consignment of bugs, most notably in enemy AI, but these were soon resolved, leaving the title more than worthy of a retrospective pick-up-'n'-play today for nostalgic pleasures.

Where *Privateer 2* had driven-up those claims about the series being more film than game, *Wing Commander: Prophecy* went back to tradition, severely reducing plot and increasing gameplay and graphics. Without Chris at the helm, Origin was left with a choice: go back to basics and regain the fleeting game's audience, or clear the

THE TIMELINE OF WING COMMANDER

Wing Commander I (1990)
The game that started it all. The Terran and Kilrathi have been at war for 20 years when *Wing Commander* begins aboard the TCS Tiger's Claw. Thanks to our heroic player-character, a young officer, the Confederation are able to lay waste to the Kilrathi Sector's headquarters and run them from Vega Sector.

The Secret Missions (1990)
This expansion pack begins when a new Kilrathi weapon, the dreadnaught Sivar, destroys the Terran colony Goddard. In revenge, the Confederation launch Operation Thor's Hammer, a daring raid in which the Tiger's Claw will follow the Kilrathi into their own territory and bring down the Sivar.

The Secret Missions 2: Crusade (1991)
The second add-on begins with the Confederation celebrating a new alliance with a bird-like species from Firekka. This brings new information that the Kilrathi are planning a holy ceremony on Firekka, which the Confederation aims to disrupt in order to deliver a crippling blow to the Kilrathi.

Super Wing Commander (1994)
Taking a chance on the 3DO, a souped-up version of *Wing Commander* was released in 1994. It had new graphics, full speech and a 'Secret Mission 1.5' campaign, with a continuation of the Thor's Hammer mission, in which the Claw wipes out the shipyards responsible for the building of the Sivar weapon.

Wing Commander II: Vengeance Of The Kilrathi (1991)
Following the Firekka story from *Crusade*, the Claw attacks the Kilrathi HQ in Enigma Sector only to be ambushed by the Kilrathi's 'Strakha' fighters, ending in the loss of the Claw. Blair is blamed but regains his reputation ten years later when he saves the Confederation's TCS Concordia.

Special Operations 1 (1991)
The expansion to *Wing Commander II* follows Blair's transfer to the Special Ops division, which is supporting defecting Kilrathi colonies. Meanwhile, a mutiny on a Confederation cruiser leads the crew to piracy. 20 new missions and the Confederation bomber, the Crossbow, were added.

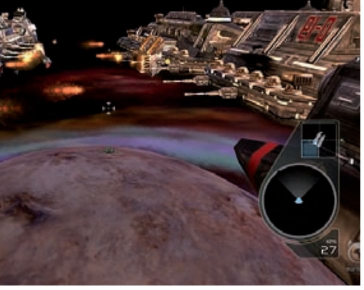


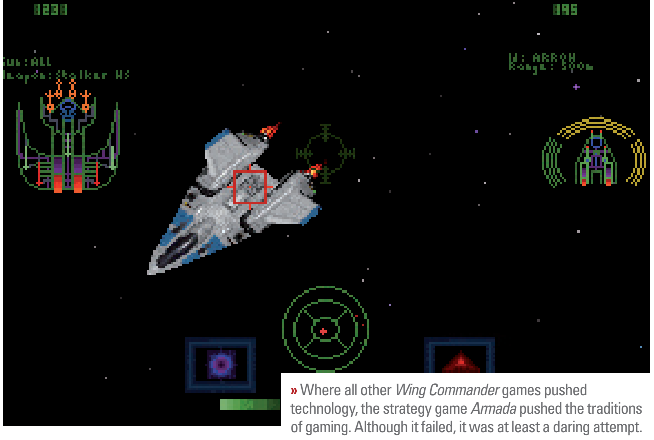




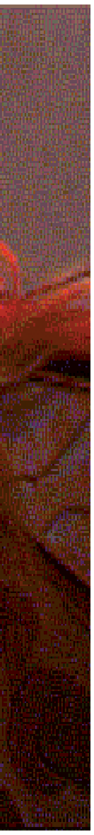








» Where all other *Wing Commander* games pushed technology, the strategy game *Armada* pushed the traditions of gaming. Although it failed, it was at least a daring attempt.





» *Wing Commander III* was the first game to legitimise the use of film in videogames.



“I wanted to spend some time just playing in film for a while so I can come back to games refreshed” Chris on a possible return to gaming

sheet and start again. It chose to go back to basics, introducing a new alien enemy, the Nephilim, pushing the graphics with the use of 3D accelerators and adding 3D cockpit views that threw players right into the heart of the action. Though the gameplay was a little simplistic in areas, *Prophecy* was the best looking of all the games in the series, making the rewards, although too easy to attain, a visual treat. *Prophecy* was later joined by the free standalone add-on *Secret Ops* that cut out the FMVs and released new episodes regularly, featuring new missions and a continuing storyline. This constitutes perhaps *Wing Commander*'s last innovation, for the idea of having a game available as a free download was something of an experimental means of distribution.



And so, the *Wing Commander* series stands – aside from EA's *Arena* in 2007 that failed to put a blip on the map – as one of the most inspirational, innovative and technology-pushing series to ever grace the PC. From the realism of the original, the voice acting of the second, the filming of the third, and the criticised prominence of story over gameplay in the fourth, every game that Chris Roberts put out changed the nature of PC gaming in some way. As Chris states: "I always tried to place the *Wing Commander* series on the bleeding edge of technology. I know at the time a lot of people were unhappy about that, but I can't tell you the number of people I've run across that said they bought a 386/25MHz with a VGA just so they could play *Wing Commander*! Maybe I should have had Intel give me a royalty!"

Chris is the sort of visionary leader that the gaming industry could use more of. We've missed him over the years, much as we've missed *Wing Commander*, but… wait a minute. Perhaps there's light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps the move to movies wasn't permanent. "I think I wanted to spend some time just playing in film for a while to fully develop my knowledge and visual syntax so I can come back to games refreshed," Chris tantalisingly discusses. "For the first time in years, I want to get back to making games, and am currently exploring my options." Perhaps we shall see him again. Perhaps we shall see porn stars in space, and ultra-realistic intergalactic combat, and perhaps, just perhaps, he'll make us buy some sodding expensive piece of kit for the pleasure.

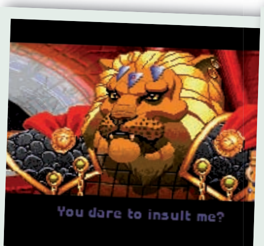
Special Operations 2 (1992)
Zachary 'Jazz' Colson, the traitor from *Wing Commander II*, responsible for message leaks, sabotages and murders, has fled from his imprisonment, and the Mandarin – a society of traitors – have stolen top-secret fighters from the Confederation. This leads Blair to a final showdown with Jazz.

Wing Commander III: Heart Of The Tiger (1994)
The game that began the live-action cut-scenes. In a desperate attempt to salvage the Confederation's dying war effort, Blair must destroy the Kilrathi home world of Kilrah. The first attempt fails. Thankfully, Blair goes on to succeed with the Templor Bomb.

Wing Commander IV: The Price Of Freedom (1996)
The Confederation/Kilrathi War is over, but ships are being destroyed regularly by fighting in the Border Worlds, leading the Confederation to political unrest with the Union of the Border Worlds. Blair unearths a conspiracy of warmongers he must expose to restore peace.

Wing Commander: Prophecy (1997) (2003 GBA)
A sense of peace is disturbed when Kilrathi worlds are attacked by a prophesied enemy, the Nephilim. When the Midway is called upon to stop them, new character Lance Casey must destroy both their organic ships and the wormhole they used to enter Kilrathi space.

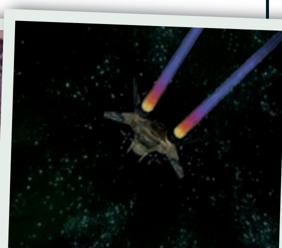
Wing Commander: Secret Ops (1998)
The Nephilim are once more causing unrest, but this time close to Earth. Casey, now aboard the Cerberus, must stave off their assault. An experimental release, new episodes of *Secret Ops* were released regularly with new missions and a continuing storyline.











SPIN-OFFS

Wing Commander Academy (1993)
Wing Commander Academy featured no missions or storylines like conventional *Wing Commander* games, but rather put the player, a new Confederation recruit, up against a simulator to prove themselves. It also allowed for customisation of levels using ships from *Wing Commander II*.

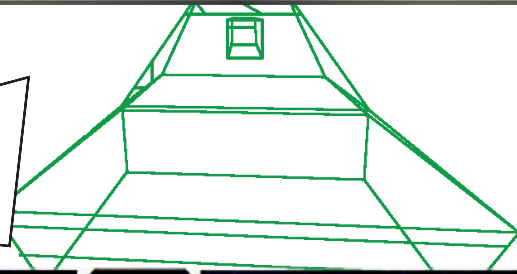
Wing Commander: Privateer (1993)
Out on the border regions of Confederation space, *Wing Commander: Privateer* set players as a Privateer – a mercenary – who earns money by pirating, trading and completing missions. While *Privateer* had a storyline, players could ignore it and play as they wanted.

Wing Commander: Armada (1994)
A strategy game set in the *Wing Commander* universe, *Wing Commander: Armada* cast players as a commander of either the Terran or Kilrathi and set them the task of conquering a section of space. *Armada* offered two modes of play: the tactically based main game and a quicker and easier set of combat missions.

The Kilrathi Saga (1996)
The Kilrathi Saga was a remade version of the first three games, updated to run on Pentium processors.

Privateer 2: The Darkening (1996)
Privateer 2 set players as Ser Lev Arris as he searches to regain his memory and identity. Much like the original *Privateer*, players can complete missions and trade, as well as attack aliens, meet a bevy of weird characters and new planets, and hire new wingmen and ships.

Wing Commander Arena (2007)
The XBLA *Wing Commander* game set players in 2701 with the mission of destroying the last remnants of the Kilrathi empire. *Wing Commander Arena* felt more like an arcade game than its predecessors, thanks to its emphasis on quick combat. Single-player offered new ships and modes and the up to-16-player multiplayer allowed for all-out warfare or team play.



THE MAKING OF… BATTLEZONE

Probably the first working example of updating a 2D arcade classic to 3D, tank-combat simulator Battlezone wowed the Eighties arcade-going public with a mix of incessant action and vector-graphics goodness. Craig Grannell talks to lead programmer Ed Rotberg about this iconic title, and how players very nearly had a much harder game to contend with





IN THE KNOW



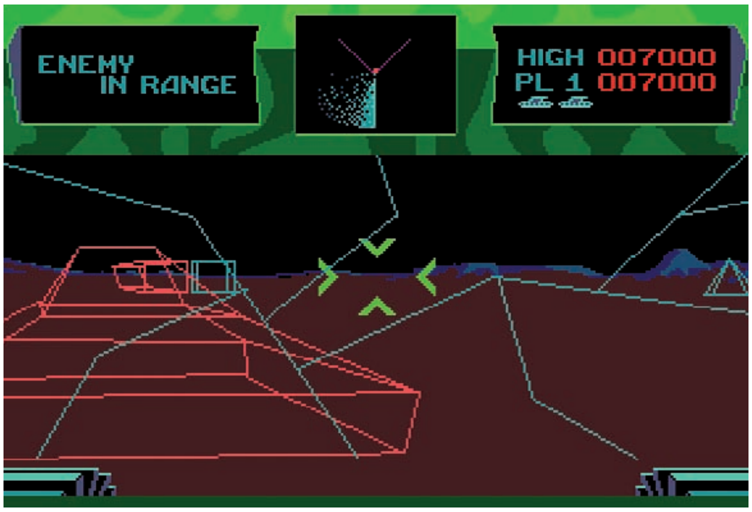
- **» PUBLISHER:** ATARI, INC
- **» DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **» RELEASED:** 1980
- **» PLATFORMS:** ARCADE (LATER CONVERTED TO VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS)
- **» GENRE:** COMBAT SIMULATION
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR AN ORIGINAL CABINET

Although every inch the retro game with its vector graphics and simple gameplay, tank-combat simulator *Battlezone* was a prescient creation. Foreshadowing a common occurrence of the PlayStation era and beyond, the Eighties Atari effort was the first time a much-loved 2D classic was reborn in glorious 3D. Suitably, it was also largely driven by technology. "Well, it all really started with the advent of the vector generator," begins Ed Rotberg, the game's lead programmer and the brains behind other Atari classics, including *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Steel Talons*. "Howard Delman developed it in response to Exidy's equivalent generator, and we realised that once we had it working, it wasn't a big step to doing 3D."

One brainstorming session later, and the idea of *Battlezone* emerged – a game pitting the player against hostile enemy tanks in what was at the time a truly unique immersive 3D environment. "The inspiration came from those early overhead-view tank games, which everyone loved," explains Ed. "And our game was the first to market with true 3D – Tim Skelly's *Tail Gunner* from 1979 was on-rails and there was no environment, just stars… and there's not much to doing stars in 3D!"

With the team limited by somewhat embryonic technology, Ed's approach to the game was overtly technical, and he was determined to squeeze every drop of power from what was available via a combination of careful planning and tight programming. "Where I started with *Battlezone*, like all my programmes, was deciding how to store the data," remembers Ed. "I knew we needed stationary objects that would have to be described, and since resources were precious, the objects had to be instanced. Hence, I repeated the same shapes throughout the game, merely varying the sizes and positioning."

According to Ed, the maths for doing 3D is pretty straightforward, and this was even the case in 1980, so his next task was projecting a view of the world from '0, 0, 0' in the universe on to the screen. "Once I got that and the field of view right, messing with the various parameters and your perspective divide, I started incrementally moving the camera around and putting in



» [Atari ST] By the 16-bit era, home machines were fully capable of replicating the *Battlezone* experience, as the accomplished Atari ST version demonstrates.



» *Battlezone*'s colours were project manager Morgan Hoff's idea, and differentiated the HUD from the action. As was common at the time, the colour was cellophane gels on the screen.

"ONE WAY YOU KNEW YOU HAD A GAME THAT WAS GONNA BE SUCCESSFUL WAS WHEN YOU WALKED INTO YOUR LAB AND HAD TO KICK PEOPLE OFF YOUR PROTOTYPE SO YOU COULD WORK ON IT" ED ROTBERG ON BATTLEZONE'S POPULARITY, EVEN DURING ITS DEVELOPMENT

controls to enable a player to steer the tank," says Ed, identifying this as the moment he got excited about the game. "It was all theoretical until that point, but once I could drive around the playfield, I knew the math and data structures were working, and I realised it was different – no one had ever done anything like this." Ed says he had no illusions at that point regarding *Battlezone* being in any way enduring, but he knew he had the first of its kind, which "was very cool from that point of view".



» The colourful-looking *Battlezone* arcade cab.

Next, it was a case of putting a moving object out there, which was the first tank. "Once I knew I could draw an object, it was a matter of encoding the tank in the data format we were using, storing it, and changing its position and orientation every frame, along with its matrix for rotation," says Ed. "This is where engineer Jed Margolin was very helpful, in coming up with a way of minimising accumulated error. We were using fixed-point machines back then – you didn't have floating-point – and accumulated error could get out of hand, making everything distort."

By now, Ed notes that others in the department were also getting excited, and were regularly coming in and playing the game. "That's one way you knew you had a game that was gonna be successful," he says. "You walked into your lab and had to kick people off your prototype so you could work on it!"

From there, Ed says *Battlezone* was a case of putting all of the pieces together – adding collision detection, building a score system, working on rudimentary AI for the game's enemies, and crafting the various objects and visual components that went into the final version.

In terms of the nature of those objects, Ed notes he was limited by the number of vectors the generator could draw and the number of 3D calculations that could be done in each frame. "The idea was to make something that you could recognise and navigate by," he says. "The mountains were easier, since they were just a backdrop, but everything else was a balancing act of what we could get to show without slowing up the frame rate."

One exception to the sparsity of the environment is the erupting volcano, which came about due to fellow programmer Owen Rubin constantly hassling Ed during *Battlezone*'s gestation. "We worked in the

» *Battlezone* utilised a unique two-stick control system, with each stick controlling one of the tank's treads.



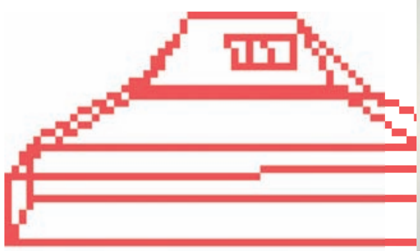
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

S.T.U.N. RUNNER (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1989

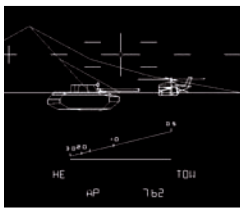
STEEL TALONS
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1991

PRO SERIES GOLF
SYSTEM: NOKIA N-GAGE
YEAR: 2008





CONVERSION CAPERS



Although technology evolved at speed in the Eighties, *Battlezone* was beyond home systems for many years. "I was working with custom hardware and controllers, and the guys converting *Battlezone* had generic systems that weren't powerful enough," says Ed. "They couldn't possibly do all the 3D graphics calculations, and they didn't have the resolution to do the kind of drawing we did on the vector generator."

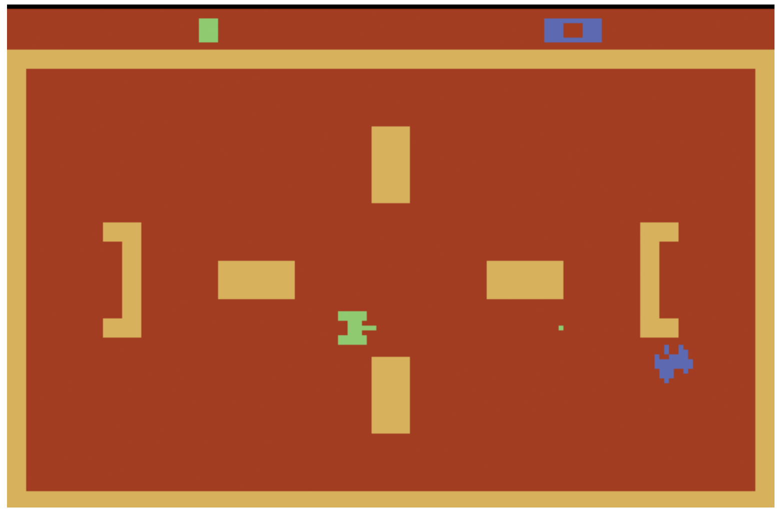
Despite the evident challenge, some memorable conversions were made, with variable levels of authenticity. On the VIC-20, speed and resolution were sacrificed, but the display somewhat resembled the original. On the VCS, vectors were ditched entirely, in favour of a fast, raster-based effort. "It was like paraphrasing – there's no way these games could quote *Battlezone*, but they could paraphrase it, and so that's what they did," considers Ed. "I had no problem with that, because I was aware of the technical hurdles."

THE MAKING OF… BATTLEZONE

WAR ZONE

A surprising offshoot of *Battlezone* was *Bradley Trainer*, a version designed for the US Army. "A group of retired generals saw *Battlezone* and thought we could come up with a training device for one of their vehicles. They got in touch with Rick Moncrief, who was gung-ho about the idea and promised a prototype in a very short amount of time," grumbles Ed, who, as a member of the 'peace generation', was anti-war and against creating something that indirectly could be used to train people to kill. "Unfortunately, no one else had familiarity with the platform or code, and so I lost three months of my life working 16-hour days to put the thing together, under condition that if Atari decided to pursue this avenue, I'd be exempt from further work on it," recalls Ed. Ultimately, Atari decided it wasn't a great business to get into, although some good unintentionally came of it. Ed explains: "The controller created for *Bradley Trainer* ended up being used in numerous other games, starting with *Star Wars*, so in that regard I guess it was a good thing!"





» [Atari 2600] Games like *Combat* and its arcade-based forebears directly influenced *Battlezone*, which took the concept into 3D.



same lab, and every day he'd come in and ask when I was going to make the volcano active," recalls Ed. One day, with Ed working on a particularly nasty problem, Owen asked the question one time too many, and Ed responded that if Owen wanted an active volcano, he should programme it himself. "The next morning, the code was sitting there on my chair, and it took me a half hour to integrate it, and Owen was very happy," says Ed, laughing. "And I never had to touch that code once I put it in – it just worked."

Looking at the game now, the volcano was perhaps the team's sole indulgence – elsewhere, *Battlezone* is tightly honed, to ensure the best gameplay experience for the player. The radar, for example, far from an extravagance, is a necessity in such a 3D environment – as Ed notes: "Put someone in our 3D world and they can't turn their head – only ponderously turn the tank – and so they needed to be able to locate enemies, to immediately react and do something about them."

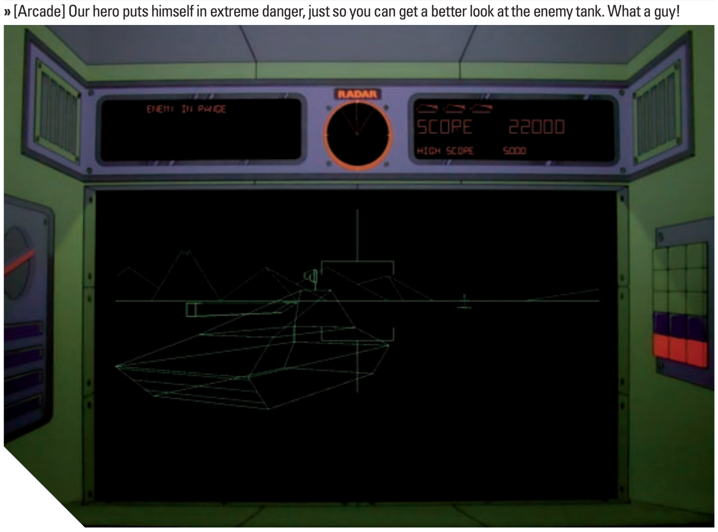
Regarding the enemies, Ed designed a fairly linear progression, starting with a standard tank that he terms "the learning level, where you figure out how to shoot". With that being fairly easy, a saucer was then introduced. "This is a high-point target, but go after it and you'll be distracted from the tank, which makes the game harder," explains Ed. For some variety and added toughness, an unsympathetic super tank was added to the mix, along with a missile.

Of the enemies, it's the missile Ed remembers most fondly. "The missile was interesting because it was the only thing that moved in the vertical dimension, other than the pieces that flew around after something exploded," he says. "I really liked the way it turned out – while there's this pseudo-random motion of zigzagging that a missile takes towards you, after a while you sort of anticipate when it's going to turn and where you need to fire – there's a Zen-like quality to fighting the missiles that was really very different to anything I'd seen in videogames to that point."

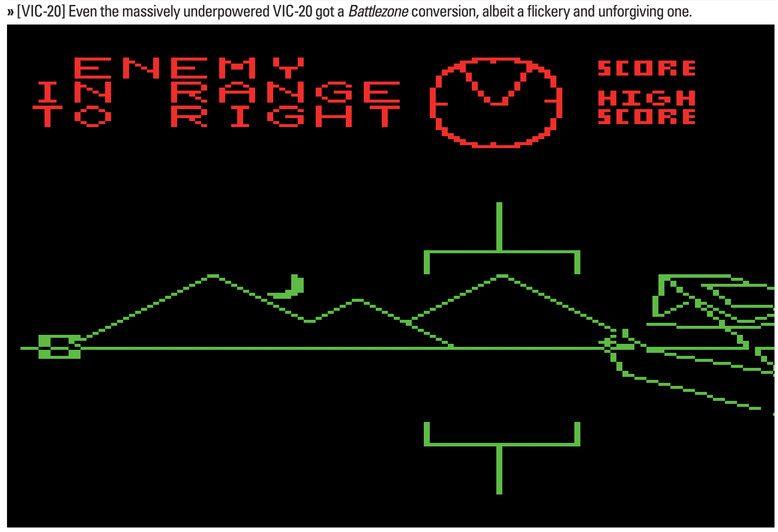
Of course, with classic Atari releases, the game was only a small part of the puzzle – the company had a penchant for crafting unique cabinets with suitably distinct controls. In the case of *Battlezone*, two sticks were provided, driving each of the virtual tank's tracks. The reason for this choice, according to Ed, was simple. "We said, well, a tank's got two treads and that's how they turn – by forward and backward motion of the treads." Budgetary restrictions limited the treads to a single speed, but this made the controls easy to learn, and various stick positions provided a diverse array of movement, enabling your tank to turn in place, turn or reverse both left and right, and travel forwards and backwards at speed.

Early versions of the cabinet also included a viewfinder for the player to peer through. "The idea was to make the game more immersive," says Ed. "I don't think it really worked, though, because it was uncomfortable." Ed also notes that this component caused other problems, notably people being unable to see the game when walking by it or when it was being played. "Atari added panels to the side so people could watch, but when it came time to take home a prototype, I took a cab without a viewfinder, because I hated it – and that's what I have to this day," remarks Ed, noting

» [Arcade] Our hero puts himself in extreme danger, just so you can get a better look at the enemy tank. What a guy!



» [VIC-20] Even the massively underpowered VIC-20 got a *Battlezone* conversion, albeit a flickery and unforgiving one.





» [DOS] *Stellar 7*, which was released on a number of different formats, takes the basic premise of *Battlezone* and surrounds it in a mission-based wrapper.



» [Atari 2600] The VCS *Battlezone* conversion dispenses with vectors and replaces them with a colourful landscape. The compelling gameplay of its arcade parent remains largely intact, though.

"PEOPLE CLAIMED THEIR FRIENDS GOT TO THE VOLCANO. BUT THE PLAYFIELD WRAPPED AROUND – 16-BITS IN EITHER DIRECTION AND YOU WERE BACK AT ZERO!" ED ROTBERG ON PEOPLE BEING ABLE TO ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE



that a combination of cost reductions and earnings indications regarding potential punters being able to see attract screens led to later units dispensing with the viewfinder entirely.

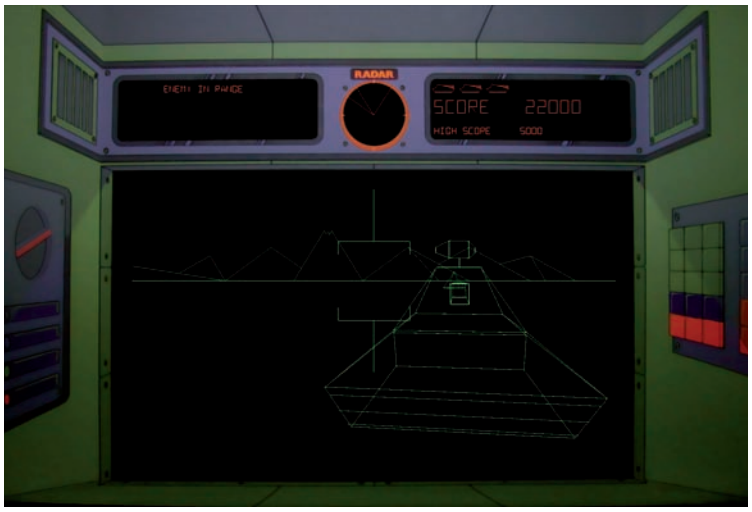
With about 15,000 units produced, *Battlezone* was a hit, and various conversions, remakes and *Battlezone*-inspired efforts peppered the market for years, ensuring the original game's legacy. We ask Ed whether in hindsight he's happy with the game he largely created, and if other ideas would have made the cut had he not been up against typically tight deadlines. "There are always things you want to include but can't, or things you'd like to improve," he considers, remembering a particularly irksome high-score bug that the team never managed to shake. "From the gameplay side, there were people who'd get really into playing for a long time, and we came up with ideas for increasing the urgency and decreasing the game time."

Had these ideas been implemented, *Battlezone* may have had an additional and particularly savage foe. "We talked about having launch tubes on the playfield, which you'd get a warning about and have to reach before they launched a missile," says Ed. "But unlike the standard missiles, these would come and kill you from above, where you had no defence. So you'd be dealing with those, super tanks and the other missiles at the same time." Mercifully, the original intent was for these devious missiles to only appear far later in the game.

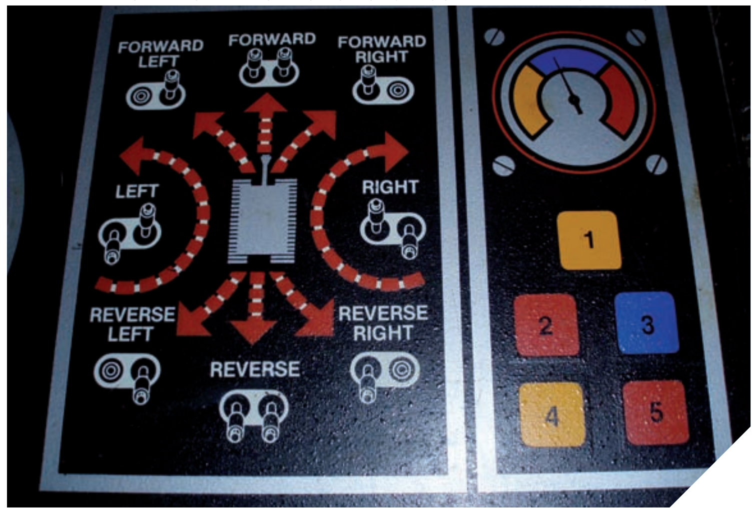
While on the subject of extra components, we ask whether there was ever any truth in the various *Battlezone* rumours, such as concepts for reaching the volcano or discovering a tank factory spewing out enemy tanks. "No, the background was strictly a background – it rotated and was at infinity, literally," says Ed, adding that there were never any plans for it to be otherwise. "We got all kinds of letters from people asking about this, or claiming their friends got to the volcano once. But the playfield wrapped around – 16-bits in either direction and you were back at zero!"

As the interview draws to a close it's very clear Ed has a lot of affection for his near-30-year-old creation. He still talks about *Battlezone* with proudness and enthusiasm, like it's an exciting new creation, and we ask whether the game was a particularly good title to work on. "It was a great game to work on," Ed confirms. "I got to use stuff I learned in college that had lain dormant until then. I also felt *Battlezone* was groundbreaking, and it's always a really cool feeling when you know you're doing something no one has seen before."

» [Arcade] Quick *Battlezone* tip: letting tanks get this close, in order to take a neat screen grab, leads to almost immediate death.



» The instructions may look complex, but they were pretty easy to get to grips with, as the tank only had one speed.



With thanks to Frederic Delaire (www.arcadefever.net) for the cabinet photography.

WHY YOU MUST PLAY

RENEGADE



IF YOU'RE A FAN OF SCROLLING FIGHTING GAMES THEN YOU OWE IT TO YOUR VIOLENT SIDE TO PLAY RENEGADE. MARTYN CARROLL LOOKS BACK AT ONE OF THE GRANDDADDIES OF THE GENRE



» For its time, the combat in *Renegade* was brutal stuff.



» Classics of the beat-'em-up genre, such as *Double Dragon*, took their inspiration from *Renegade*.

It seems so tame and cartoon-like nowadays, but back in 1986 *Renegade* was one of the most violent videogames in the arcades. Pitting you against a gang of street punks, the moves at your disposal extended far beyond the usual kicks and punches seen in other fighting games. You could grab enemies by their scruffs and knee them in the nut sack, not once but four times, before flinging them over your shoulder. You could dash towards enemies and deliver a running punch or flying kick to their befuddled faces. And it wasn't all about flair, as you could finish off floored enemies by stooping down and beating them to death.

Going hand in hand with the violence were the seedy overtones introduced by publisher Taito when the game was regionalised for the US and Europe. The original Japanese version, developed by Technos and entitled *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-Kun* (roughly translated as Hot-Blooded Tough Guy Kunio), involved brawling school kids, yet, for the Westernised version, all of the graphics were redrawn. Scrap-happy students were transformed into muggers, pimps and pushers, and the locales were given a grimy makeover. The plot was also altered – the original saw Kunio settling a score with rival high-school bullies who were beating up his brother, while *Renegade* featured an unnamed hero rescuing his girl from a gang of kidnappers.

Renegade is one of the earliest examples of a scrolling beat-'em-up. Set over four succinct levels, the viewpoint shifts back and forth as you tackle several small-fry assailants. When their numbers have been whittled down, the level's boss character will muscle in. Defeat

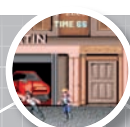
TIMELINE



KUNG-FU MASTER
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1984



RENEGADE
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1986



TARGET: RENEGADE
Version Featured: Spectrum
Year Released: 1988



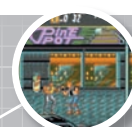
DOUBLE DRAGON
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1987



STREET GANGS
Version Featured: NES
Year Released: 1990



FINAL FIGHT
Version Featured: Arcade
Year Released: 1989



STREETS OF RAGE
Version Featured: Mega Drive
Year Released: 1991

THE CONVERSIONS













1. COMMODORE 64
C64 owners received a very faithful version of the game that featured most of the arcade elements including slick, scrolling backgrounds. Sadly, the three-button attack system was replicated too, meaning that players were forced to have one hand on the joystick and the other on the keyboard. Not good.

2. ZX SPECTRUM
Against the odds, the Spectrum version came out fighting. It looked great, with nicely detailed graphics and colourful backdrops, sounded amazing thanks to its 128K tunes, but best of all, the fighting moves were cleverly mapped to a single attack button. Joystick jugglers everywhere celebrated!

3. AMSTRAD CPC
The CPC version used the same control system as on the C64, which made it difficult to pull off smooth moves in the heat of the action. Which is a shame, because the graphics are great, even if the scrolling had to be sacrificed. This was one occasion when CPC owners would have been better off with a Speccy port.

4. AMIGA
What happened here? The Amiga version slipped out as a budget game in 1992 and it's not hard to see why a full-price release was rejected. The graphics resembled the arcade original but it played like a dog thanks to the unresponsive controls and choppy animation. The Atari ST version was very similar and equally bad.

5. NES
This crazy conversion blazed its own trail with lots of twists on the original. The first fight in the subway continues on to the train, for example, and later on there's a motorbike chase where you have to kick rival riders! The controls were cleverly rejigged to work with the NES pad and overall this is a fun little distraction.

6. SEGA MASTER SYSTEM
Somewhat bizarrely, this classy version for Sega's 8-bit console was released in 1993, years after the original debuted in arcades. It's actually based on the NES version, albeit with greatly improved sound and graphics, and throws in some nice extras like new moves and cut-scenes. Definitely one for the collection.

the boss and you move on to the next level to face another gang of ner-do-wells. Movement of the main character is fast and fluid, as you can move in eight directions and a double-tap of the control stick results in a very useful dash. The actual fighting moves are not so well implemented. Three buttons are used – one for punch, one for jump and one for kick, which sounds sensible, except that the punch and kick buttons are reversed depending on whether you're facing left or right. It takes a fair bit of getting used to and you'll certainly waste a few credits as you fumble with the controls. And even when you've got to grips with it, you'll need a good stash of credits at your disposal to beat the game. On the default dipswitch settings you have just a single life and a measly two minutes to complete each level. Early on, the lack of time is the biggest factor and you need to dispose of enemies quickly by kicking or throwing them out of the playing area. As you progress, your life becomes precious as blade-wielding baddies threaten to snuff you out with a single stab.

Renegade may be as tough as old boots but its endearing violence persuades you to push on and face the final boss. When he's down and your girl is safe, the game loops back to the beginning and the enemies are tougher, at which point you'll want to walk away. It's definitely worth playing, however, if only to see how much it influenced *Double Dragon, Golden Axe, Final Fight* and the other scrolling fighters that dominated the arcades in the late-Eighties and early-Nineties. Its legacy outside of the arcade is also notable, as it was ported to most home systems with generally excellent results. In fact, most readers will probably be more familiar with the home conversions, particularly Imagine Software's very popular 8-bit attempts, so if you fall into that camp it's only right and proper that you check out the source material and start cracking some skulls.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR



SUBWAY BOSS
Looking like Jacko as done by Weird Al Yankovic, the first boss grabs you by the neck and shouts "Get lost, punk!" if you get too close.



BIKER BOSS
This boss tells you to "Beat it, scum!", which is all the more reason for slinging him and his boys off the end of their pier.



BACK ALLEY BOSS
Or 'Big Bertha', as Imagine named her. The trick is to kick her in the face when she does her run attack.



BIG BOSS
This guy opens fire when you storm his pad. You need to use your bullet-dodging skills to beat him and finish the game.

TRY THIS NEXT

DOUBLE DRAGON
Renegade and the original Japanese game both spawned their own spin-offs for the home market, so fans of fisticuffs are really spoilt for choice. Imagine released two follow-ups in as many years – *Target: Renegade*, which was great, and *Renegade III*, which was not. Technos turned out a series of Kunio games. But the true successor to *Renegade* is 1987's *Double Dragon*. Technos designer Yoshihisa Kishimoto basically took *Renegade* and added co-op play, refined controls, larger levels and more moves (including weapon attacks). The result was an arcade classic that came to define the beat-'em-up genre.




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The Forgotten Ones

STUART CAMPBELL HAS THE MEMORY OF AN ELEPHANT, WHICH IS WHY HE'S SO SCARED OF MICE. JOIN HIM NOW AS HE PAYS EMOTIONAL TRIBUTE TO THE FORGOTTEN ONES, WHILE NERVOUSLY CHECKING THE SKIRTING BOARDS

Viewers, sit down for a minute. There's something I need to tell you about the videogames industry. It hates you. Sorry to break the news so bluntly, but it really, really hates you. Every single interaction the videogames industry is forced to have with videogamers – with the exception of you handing it your money and shutting your mouth – makes it feel dirty and sick. Indeed, it hates you so much that sometimes even handing over your money and shutting up isn't good enough. Sometimes, as hard as you bang on its door and leave increasingly desperate messages on its answering machine, merely trying to throw your cash at it isn't good enough. But we're getting a little ahead of ourselves.

Even as the rest of the world rushes towards a true global market, videogame publishers are investing more and more effort into enforcing territorial protection of software in an attempt to stop anyone from ever playing a game that wasn't actually produced within their own country's borders. Nintendo's remarkable decision to implement region-locking on the forthcoming DSi – a portable games machine specifically designed to be carried all over the world, remember – is just the most bizarre of a string of such user-hostile acts that have been perpetrated ever since the first console was born. And the tight territorial control of software is one of the primary factors which has brought about the appearance of a relatively new phenomenon in the world of games – a rarity market.

It's increasingly common to see games these days being released in 'Special Edition', 'Director's Cut' or 'Collector's' versions (usually nothing more 'special' than an excuse to charge you an extra £20 for a tin box, a cheap plastic model and a making-of DVD that nobody with an ounce of self-respect for their own immortal soul will ever watch). Yet paradoxically, few things are actually less 'collectable' than those released with that specific purpose in mind. As any music, book or comic buff will tell you, the true collectables are the one-offs – the EMI version of the Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen*, the Beach Boys' never-released *Smile* album, the first print run of *Watchmen* or even the few copies of Eighties videogames magazine *Crash*, which went out to subscribers featuring a venomous satire on its rival *Sinclair User*, before the rival got wind of it and had the magazine injuncted, withdrawn from sale and republished with the offending pages crudely torn out.

Given the cost of developing a game up to completion, the videogames world has a surprisingly high number of such genuinely 'collectable' non-releases. You'd think that once you'd spent a million quid on producing the game, the cost of running off a few CDs and getting it into the shops to try to recoup at least some of your money was peanuts, but in fact the business unexpectedly often just gives up on titles entirely. Similarly, it's impossible to understand companies who take savage legal action against grey importers of games that the publisher have no intention of releasing in other territories (how could it possibly hurt them to have an importer buy an extra thousand copies of their game, with the intention of selling them to people in countries where it's never going to be released?), but it happens all the time – try finding an internet seller who'll flog you a legit copy of a Japan-only PSP game, for example, after Sony threw all the weight of its lawyers at a few sites in 2005 and 2006 to prevent them generating some revenue for the electronics giant.

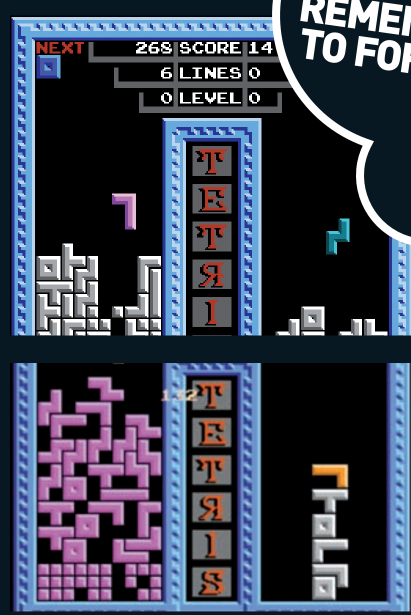
But ever since the advent of practicable emulation in the latter half of the Nineties (without which you probably wouldn't even be reading this magazine, for one thing), the entire global history of videogames has been available to anyone who wants it. Rather than being tied up in the physical medium, games have been once more reduced to their most basic component – raw computer code. Now that anyone is able to have the equivalent of tens of thousands of pounds worth of development kit accessible to them for the price of a download, even fragments of game code that have been abandoned and hidden away uselessly in developers' cupboards for many years can come to life, providing a unique glimpse into what might have been.

Come with **Retro Gamer** now, as we meet a few of the Forgotten Ones – the games nobody wanted you to play, locked away for years without trial but which are now standing blinking in the sunlight and waiting to show you what you were missing all those years.

I FORGOT TO REMEMBER TO FORGET

TETRIS (NES)

We can't really call this one 'forgotten', of course. The various legal shenanigans surrounding *Tetris* for the NES are well-documented, and the most celebrated case was the one which saw Atari offshoot Tengen forced to withdraw and destroy the entire stock of its excellent NES version of the game, in favour of Nintendo's own inferior realisation. (Which, in fairness, at least had a less bizarre control system, Tengen having inexplicably opted to rotate blocks with Up and Down on the D-pad and drop them to the bottom with the fire button, presumably making the decision during a design meeting somewhere in Amsterdam. Needless to say it didn't really work). In one of the greatest victories for international code rescue, however, ROM dumpers were able to retrieve the coveted code from one of a handful of surviving carts, and Tengen *Tetris* is finally running wild and free.



Wow, these two guys really suck at *Tetris*.



▶ It's quite rare to catch this many riders on the screen at once, so don't complain about the rather boring bit of course that they're on.

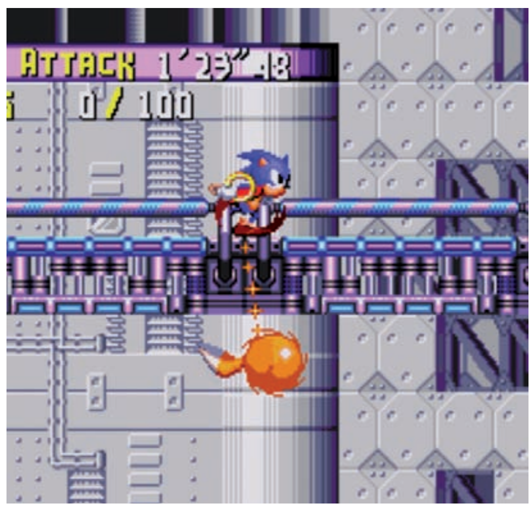
MARIO EXCITE BIKE
(SNES)

This extremely professional-looking hybrid of *Super Mario Kart* and vintage NES title *Excitebike* is a genuine lost Nintendo classic, legitimately playable only by the handful of customers of the short-lived Satellaview download system. (Other notable Satellaview releases included a clutch of exclusive *Zelda* levels, and several entire new versions of *F-Zero* with all-original tracks.) Because the Satellaview no longer exists, you have to sit and watch various title screens and demo modes for almost five minutes before you can actually play (as the game is confused by not being online), but when you finally get to it, the gameplay lives up to the bloodline – slick and well-balanced, with many features lifted straight out of *SMK*, and featuring the first true colour appearance of Wario. Nintendo has diversified the *Mario* brand out into a million different genres – fighting games, party board games and suchlike – but this was the first time it really tried shoving its most famous character into another one of its existing properties, and whether it's the spiritual forebear of *WarioWare*, *Smash Bros. Brawl* and *Mario Party 8* or not it's a lovely little curiosity, and one which you'd have been stupendously unlikely ever to get a glimpse of without the miracle of emulation.

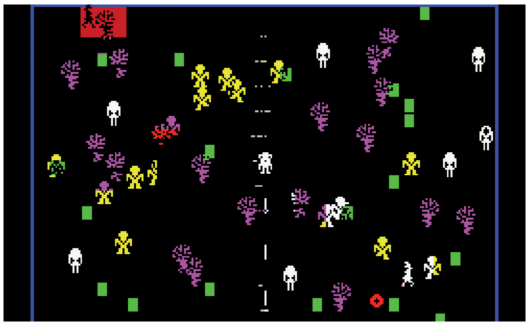


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 4
(Mega Drive)

The elastic band has made unsurprisingly few significant appearances in videogames – off the top of this reporter's head, there's only the old Atari *Asteroids*-derivative coin-op *Space Duel*, Denton Designs' future sport *Bounces* on the Spectrum, and the odd Amiga/ST puzzle game of Newtonian physics, *E-Motion*. So it was a bit of a turn-up to discover that the planned fourth game in Sega's flagship *Sonic* series was intended to feature the player controlling both Sonic and his old pal Tails simultaneously, the two characters being connected with the traditional paper-binding stationery item. *Sonic 4* (which exists as an early leaked alpha version) is otherwise a pretty traditional *Sonic* game of high-speed platforming, but adding the elastic factor to Sonic's usual pinball physics renders it extraordinarily chaotic and confusing, with the characters hurtling and ricocheting around the screen like a set of rubber nunchakas attached to the end of a yo-yo wielded by a blind-drunk Jackie Chan during an epileptic fit. Presumably, Sega realised very quickly that this would baffle the living heck out of your average *Sonic* fan, and abandoned the project in order to concentrate fully on making a really big screw-up of the then-imminent Saturn launch.



▶ We're pretty sure that it'd be great to have a flying fox on an elastic lead in real life, though.



▶ This is *Robotron*. Man, everyone loves *Robotron*. I'm almost tempted to start hating it just for the laughs.

ROBOTRON: 2084 (Spectrum)

That you can play this now is one of the miracles of code-rescue in the modern age. When Atarisoft made a short-lived and ill-fated foray into the world of Spectrum games back in the early-Eighties with a series of classic arcade conversions, *Robotron* was the most keenly awaited of all the ones announced in the initial teaser ads. Cunningly, Atarisoft had decided to kill two birds with one stone for its Speccy range – to save on development time and avoid costly court cases, it threatened the developers of some popular unlicensed clone games with legal action unless they handed over and/or modified their work to produce the official Atarisoft port. So it was with *Robotron*, which was based on the code of Paul Holmes' splendid derivative *Wild West Hero*. After going through several iterations and ending up as a startlingly magnificent replication of the coin-op, the game was eventually pulled entirely as Atarisoft withdrew from the Speccy market, and over the years all the master tapes – including those belonging to the author himself – were lost.

Fortunately, however, by sheer luck this very reporter had in the Eighties been conducting something of a playground piracy career, swapping C90s full of copied games with various shadowy contacts, one of whom was connected to Atarisoft and had laid hands on the finished version of *Robotron*. A mere 15 or so years later, Holmes was reunited with his work, and the game was released to the Speccy emulation community with the full blessing of its owner.

(See also the almost-as-good Speccy port of *Moon Patrol*, which was lost and then found again in a near-identical way.)

SUPER 3D NOAH'S ARK (SNES)

Religious videogaming was a genre that never really caught on, but that it didn't certainly wasn't the fault of games like *Super 3D Noah's Ark*. Using what looks very much like the *Wolfenstein 3D* engine, *Super 3D Noah's Ark* sees you trying to ensure the Bible-described safety of the world's animals by pacifying them with food (fired from a catapult, slightly rudely) until they fall into a peaceful and contented snooze. (Aw.) Oddly, this particular ark seems to have considerably more than two of everything, so you have to fairly peg it around the beautifully realised wooden boat sending the furry critters off to Dreamland, before, presumably, picking out the best breeding pair and heaving the rest overboard while they innocently slumber. (This crucial element of the ancient story procedure being oddly glossed over.) *Super 3D Noah's Ark* is the kind of game that you'd never see get a release in Britain if you lived to be 250, but which can now be played regardless thanks to the efforts of pirates, hackers and emulator coders. Truly, God really does work in extraordinarily mysterious ways.



▶ What game is complete without a few sleeping goats lying around?

GYRUSS (Spectrum)

Sinclair's ill-fated Interface 2 cartridge device never saw very much in the way of software – a load of utterly pointless port-overs of Ultimate's early 16K games was pretty much its lot. How different things could have been if plans by celebrated Atari VCS game manufacturer Parker Brothers had come to fruition – way back in 1984, it announced imminent Speccy conversions of top coin-ops *Gyruss* and *Star Wars* (with several more to follow), which would come on the fab new instant-access ROM carts and sell at the slightly forbidding price of £19.95. Programming proceeded apace, only to be swiftly curtailed when some fool pointed out to Parker that the Interface 2 had sold somewhere in the region of seven units in the first six months, and the company was never heard from again. (Why Parker didn't take the games, which were all written in 16K and didn't require the Interface 2 hardware to run, and just stick them out on tape to get some of its money back is anyone's guess.) *Star Wars* later surfaced as an ordinary tape-loading game from Domark, but *Gyruss* was lost for all eternity.

At least, it was until 2008, when the entire range of canned Parker games were recovered and dumped to ROM file by archivists, and released for all to play via legendary Speccy-history site World Of Spectrum. Of all the previously missing titles (which also included a semi-complete *Popeye*, *Q*Bert*, a version of *Montezuma's Revenge* renamed *Panama Joe* and a prototype version of *Star Wars* much inferior to Domark's vanilla-Speccy port), *Gyruss* was the biggest draw, and it's a decent if no-frills conversion with most of the arcade gameplay intact. At £19.95, though, there would have been violence in the streets.



▶ On the Speccy, you took colour where you could get it.



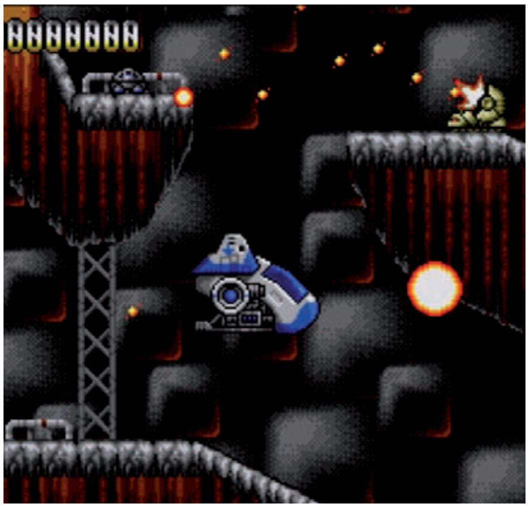
As you can plainly tell from this screenshot, the game is faster and harder. However, the increased challengingness is not pictured.

FASTER, HARDER, MORE CHALLENGING Q*BERT (Arcade)

One of a highly exclusive club of coin-ops which never made it into arcades (other members include *Joust 2* and the near-mythical *Marble Madness 2: Marble Man*, recently exposed in depth in **Retro Gamer**), *FHMC Q*Bert* was a follow-up to the hugely popular original starring the foul-mouthed, big-nosed pyramid painter, featuring gameplay more or less identical to the first game only faster, harder and more challenging. Obviously. *Q*Bert*'s 15 minutes expired before the coin-op could make it into arcades, though, and it remained locked away in the vaults of videogame legend until the advent of MAME, whereupon original author Warren Davis released the game's code into the public domain with his blessing. Emulation fans the world over marvelled at the strikingly literal title, the almost totally unchanged gameplay and graphics and the incredibly brutal difficulty level, and moved swiftly on.

RES-Q (Mega Drive)

The only genuine British rarity here, *Res-Q* (pronounced 'Rescue', obviously) was a Mega Drive game from the late, lamented Psygnosis which was overtaken by developments in the MD scene before it got as far as any shop shelves. (Or rather, the total lack of them, as the platform's economic viability collapsed almost overnight thanks to the advent of the PlayStation.) Allegedly a little disgruntled at all its hard work being wasted, programmer Tempest Software released the code to the emulation community with its blessing. It's not difficult to understand Psygnosis's thinking – while slickly executed, the game is a fairly ponderous underground-exploring mission that really belongs on an Amiga or Atari ST, and its chances of being a hit with the Mega Drive audience would have to be counted as very slim indeed. Such was the problem of producing cartridge games in the pre-CD era, of course – it's too expensive just to stick something out and see how it does, even if you've just spent 18 months and a couple of hundred thousand quid developing it, just in time to see the console go down the toilet.



Psygnosis did love its giant sprites, but that chopper must have been a bugger to manoeuvre in a labyrinthine cave system.

I FORGOT TO REMEMBER TO FORGET

THRILL KILL (PlayStation)

Almost since the day they were invented, videogames have had to cope with a barrage of attacks from the media about violent and sexual content (even though videogames deal with sex about a hundredth as frequently as any other kind of entertainment media does), so it wasn't at all surprising when one day they gave up protesting their innocence and decided that if you've done the time, you might as well do the crime.

So it was that *Thrill Kill* was born, a four-player beat-'em-up for the PSone built from nothing *but* violent and sexual content (and grunting death metal), which became perhaps the most famous and least forgotten unreleased game of all time. When staid Electronic Arts bought out prospective publisher Virgin, it took one look at its release schedules and decided that this wasn't the sort of thing it wanted its name on, and canned the completed game just weeks before it was due to hit the shelves. So appalled was EA at the game's content, indeed, that it even vowed never to sell it on to any other publisher lest any member of the public get their hands on it and precipitate a complete moral collapse in society that would make the Russell Brand/Jonathan Ross/Andrew Sachs affair look like a ridiculously trivial incident of a couple of comedians being a bit rude to an old man's answering machine by comparison. Yep, *that* bad.

Of course, the development team were somewhat miffed at all their hard work being deemed too evil for public consumption and sentenced to videogaming Guantanamo Bay, so when it finally became clear some time later that *Thrill Kill* would never see the light of day, the code was released on to the internet for anyone with a chipped PlayStation or an emulator to enjoy. As it happened this wasn't an easy task, as the game was fairly rubbish, but it's the thought that counts.





▶ In terms of the release schedules, Mega Drive *Virtua Fighter 2* suffered a Ring Out of its own.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 2
(Mega Drive)

This is the only game in this selection to have actually seen the inside of a shop anywhere in the world. The Mega Drive might have dropped down dead in Europe in 1994, but the huge installed user bases kept its life-support machine switched on overseas as late as 1996, when Sega had a bash at cashing in on the massive success of *Virtua Fighter* with this 2D incarnation of the sequel. Unlike the Game Gear version, which was related to *Virtua Fighter* in name only, it's a surprisingly effective translation of the real thing (which, after all, actually plays in 2D anyway), with almost all the characters, moves and locations intact. The problem, in as much as there is one, is that putting *Virtua Fighter* in 2D tends to rather expose its weaknesses as a beat-'em-up when competing with conventional 2D fighters like *Street Fighter II* on their own territory. Still, this is an impressive piece of work in anyone's book, and it sold so few copies that your chances of ever coming across a 'real' one are tiny.

DUKE NUKEM 3D
(Mega Drive)

In the dying days of the 16-bit consoles, the first-person shooter was something of a Holy Grail. The SNES actually managed a fairly respectable last hurrah for its dedicated fans, with first a port of id's groundbreaking, genre-spawning *Wolfenstein 3D*, and then an impressively faithful, Super FX-assisted conversion of the mighty *Doom*. Mega Drive owners weren't so lucky, with nothing much more impressive than Accolade's fun but technically primitive *Zero Tolerance* to carry the flag for them (not that you'd have been able to see much of the flag through the tiny letterboxed screen barely a quarter of the screen in height).

It comes as quite a shock, then, to see how different things might have been, in the shape of *Duke Nukem 3D*. Related only passingly to the PC original, Mega Drive *Duke Nukem* is nevertheless a technical tour de force, shifting a glorious full-screen display around at lightning speed. (In fact, it's *so* fast that it renders the game astonishingly tough at even the easiest difficulty setting.) The only compromise comes in the form of the fairly heavy graphical distortion of enemies when you get close to them, but it isn't bad enough to render them unrecognisable, and much of the distinctive *Duke* atmosphere survives. Looking at this, it's difficult to believe that the old Mega Drive wouldn't have been capable of a pretty decent stab at *Doom*, if it had only lived long enough to find out.



▶ Do not adjust your magazine. It actually did look like this.



▶ Our sources report that this hostage is close to release.

THE PRISONERS

The Parker Brothers games on the Spectrum prove that it's never too late. It took over 20 years for *Gyruss* and its fellow inmates to break out to freedom, so there's hope yet that the great mythical Speccy titles like *The Great Giana Sisters*, *Solar Jetman* and *Mire Mare* will one day escape into the warm embrace of the loving public. In the meantime, tie a yellow ribbon around your old PC.

And there are plenty of other Forgotten Ones too, of course. There are the games we all know about, that definitely exist in readily playable form and which in some cases did achieve brief and limited official releases, but which have disastrously fallen into the hands of hideous, greedy, selfish 'collectors' – or kidnappers as they should properly be regarded – and languish unopened, unplayed and unloved in high-security climate-controlled subterranean vaults, waiting for the day we all pray for when all collectors are struck down by an ironically rare and wholly gruesome flesh-eating virus. *Marble Madness 2*, *Space Invaders Virtual Collection*, *SD Gundam Dimension War*, and all the others – we won't forget about you. Be strong.

THE CLASSIC GAME



Baldur's Gate

B*aldur's Gate* stands as a true landmark in RPG history. The result of the combined brilliance of BioWare and Black Isle Studios, it not only brought the *Forgotten Realms* to life like never before, but did so through the greatest implementation of the Dungeons & Dragons rule set ever seen in a computer game: the legendary Infinity engine.

Following in the footsteps of its spiritual predecessor *Fallout*, *Baldur's Gate* solidified the revival of what was at the time a very stagnant genre. This outstanding fantasy epic won six Game Of The Year and 12 Role-Playing Game Of The Year awards in 1998 and went on to spawn a superb expansion pack, an absolutely brilliant sequel, and the highly praised *Icewind Dale* spin-off series. Now, as if you needed more convincing, Craig Ritchie shows us why *Baldur's Gate* is the Classic Game.



Paladin

These proud warriors are the paradigm of all that is virtuous and good in the *Dungeons & Dragons* universe. Having lived such pious and noble lives, their chosen deity has bestowed upon them the blessings of a healing touch and divine protection from evil. It's fair to say that they probably wouldn't be the most fun at parties, though.



Mage

What would a high fantasy tale be without the essential wizards, wands, witches and warlocks? A normal story, that's what. So, of course, any Dungeons & Dragons party worth its salt has within its ranks one of these revered practitioners of the arcane arts. Get on the end of one of their magic missiles or fireballs and you'll certainly know it.



Cleric

As everyone knows, defeating crazed wizards and smiting evil all day long can be a rather dangerous job. With the NHS no longer providing health-care services to the Sword Coast area, clerics have become ever more sought after. Nowadays, even evil Drow elves such as Viconia here have little trouble finding work.



Thief

The word 'thief' often carries with it negative connotations and is usually associated only with petty stealing. This paints an exceptionally unfair picture of these fine, upstanding members of society: they are also very adept at picking locks, setting and disarming traps, and moving about without being noticed. Also, stabbing people in the back.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

BEST AREA



Could it be anywhere else?

Once you have uncovered the mysteries of the Cloakwood Mines, you finally find yourself able to enter the sprawling city of Baldur's Gate, home to Duke Eltan, the Flaming Fist, the powerful Merchant's League, and much more. Yet, despite four chapters having passed, you still have a long way to go. A slew of NPCs with a wide variety of sub-quests, numerous unique shops and an intricately crafted plot all combine to make this an engrossing and highly memorable part of your journey. And, as you soon find out, Baldur's Gate's greatest secrets lie not with its citizens, but are to be found far, far below the city streets.

BEST ITEM



Hand-crafted perfection

Choosing just one item out of the multitude on offer in *Baldur's Gate* was no easy task, but we eventually decided on this little beauty. After slaying an Ankheg, one of those bothersome subterranean arthropods from the Sword Coast, you can take its shell to the Thunderhammer Smithy in Beregost. There, the blacksmith Taerom will fashion it into extremely hardy plate armour for 4,000 gold pieces. It takes him ten days to make it – but we reckon that's cos he's using the down payment to get pissed out of his skull for a week, spending two days recovering from the hangover and then banging the armour together the night before.

BEST ENCOUNTER



Is Drizzt your real name?

Making full use of the licence, BioWare drew upon the existing *Forgotten Realms* canon and included a few cameo appearances by legends from the novels and pen-and-paper campaigns. While travelling south of Candlekeep, the party stumbles upon one of the most famous characters from the background literature, Drizzt Do'Urden. The lone-wandering Drow elf has come under attack from a band of gnolls and asks for your help in the battle. In an example of good role-playing freedom, the player can then fight alongside Drizzt or attack him and take his enchanted scimitars – two of the most powerful weapons in the game.

BEST ENEMY



Sarevok, of course

A huge, evil warrior who is in fact a child of Bhaal, the dead Lord of Murder, Sarevok is responsible for much of the ills facing the Sword Coast. He's to blame for Gorion's death, is behind the tainted ore causing the iron shortage, and has ties with the ever-growing bandit problem facing the region. Sarevok is a tough opponent that the player has to face more than once during their quest, his incredible swordsmanship aided by his being impervious to magical attacks. What's more, Sarevok has his own sinister reason for hunting down your character – but we won't give this away in case you haven't played the game yourself.

BEST QUEST



Expansive stuff

Given the success of the title and the expandable design of the underlying Infinity engine, *Tales Of The Sword Coast* was inevitable. While not adding to the overall Bhaal storyline, it did add new quest areas, with Durlag's Tower being the main attraction. Skeletons, basilisks and battle horrors are only the start of the foes you have to vanquish as you venture further into the brilliantly crafted levels of the tower. While initially on the hunt for a dwarf's lost Soultaker dagger, the player can also pick up numerous sub-quests, making the whole experience of Durlag's Tower a rich and fulfilling extension of the main plot.

STANDOUT MOMENT



More than meets the eye

An old man in red robes approaches you from time to time, asking probing questions and occasionally guiding you on your way. He seems suspiciously interested in you and your now-deceased guardian Gorion. As it turns out, this elderly fellow is the legendary Elminster, Sage of Shadowdale. Popularised in the *Forgotten Realms* novels, Elminster could be regarded as the official D&D homage to Gandalf – a wise, well travelled and weathered old mage whose unassuming demeanour belies the vast power he yields. Having Elminster himself pointing you along in your journey meant that you were a part of something epic indeed.

What the mags said… ages ago

Games First 5/5

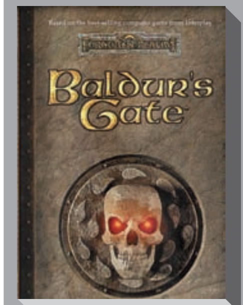
"What *Half-Life* was to 3D shooters, *Baldur's Gate* looks to be for RPGs – a game that takes a genre to the next level."

Gamespot 9.2/10

"Not only is *Baldur's Gate* easily the best computer adaptation of AD&D ever, it also convincingly returns role-playing games to the forefront of computer gaming."

What we think

There can be no doubt – *Baldur's Gate* is a true classic. While it may have since been surpassed by its superior sequel, the original paved the way for the computer role-playing landscape we enjoy today. A must-play if you haven't before, and a great title to revisit if you have.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** PC
- **DEVELOPER:** BIOWARE
- **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **GENRE:** RPG
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID

TOP 25 ISOMETRIC GAMES

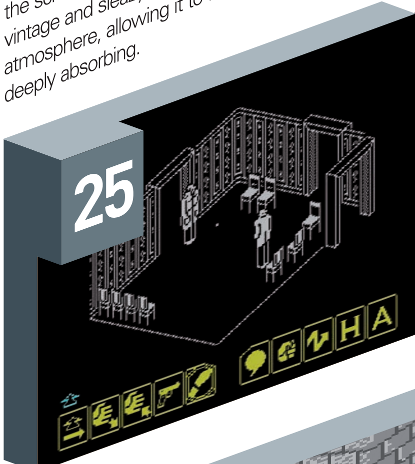
Cripes, we really struggled to put this list together this issue. It wasn't until we actually sat down and thought about it that we began to realise just how many classic isometric games there actually are. The ¾ style is one that has stretched genres – strategy, action, puzzle; you name it, the style's pretty much covered it. So trying to pit various genres against one another wasn't an easy undertaking, but we had a damn good crack at it. We pondered and mulled for a long while until we were happy with our final list (just about anyway).

Movie

■ **Year:** 1986
■ **Publisher:** Imagine

Few games have opted to invoke the gritty and suave styling of detective cinema, and even fewer a sleazy film noir. *Movie* is a game that is both, and does it with charming bluster. Set in a bizarrely nonchalant world where everyone seems to walk around with both hands punched powerfully into their pockets – even when they're being hit or shot at – *Movie* slots you into the role of a detective as he embarks on a case to locate an incriminating audio tape that's being held inside a mob hideout. Initially, *Movie* feels a rigid and cumbersome beast to get to grips with. Its clumsy to-and-fro control system, which finds you having to continually scroll between action icons at the base of the screen, certainly takes time to acclimatise to, but its vintage and sleazy ambience gives it gravitas, charm and atmosphere, allowing it to feel truly timeless, fresh and deeply absorbing.

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Fallout

■ **Year:** 1997
■ **Publisher:** Interplay

The third game may currently be bathing in critical acclaim, but there are still plenty of reasons to play Black Isle Studios' startlingly original post-apocalyptic adventure.

Starting in an underground complex known as Vault 13, your hero's initial quest is to find a new water supply for the complex's inhabitants. Before long though you'll find yourself involved within an intricate plot that includes defeating a mutant called The Master, destroying his base and a conclusion so bleak it makes the recent ending of *The Mist* seem cheerful.

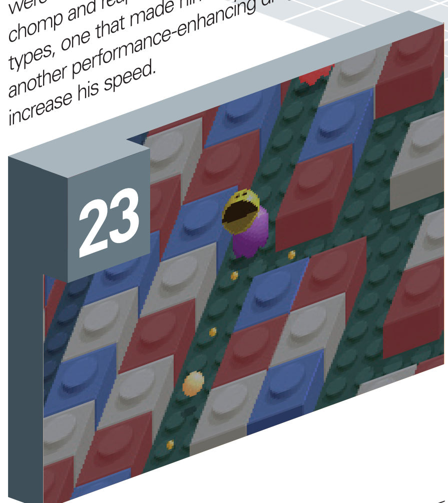
Throw in a solid combat system, the ability to recruit various NPCs and some excellent voice acting, courtesy of the likes of Ron Perlman and Keith David, and the end result is an isometric adventure that just keeps on giving.

Pac-Mania

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** Namco

At the time of *Pac-Mania's* conception, isometric was regarded as the best way of fudging an extra dimension, and making 3D games that didn't look like they were drawn by money spiders. *Pac-Mania* marked a succinct and brilliant change in the *Pac-Man* canon. Namco spruced up the classic top-down viewpoint with isometrics, the yellow pill-popper went all spherical, found he could jump (a great addition that was annoyingly only used again in *Pac-Land*) and also found himself with an extra two spectres to avoid, too. As well as having a visual refurbishment, the *Pac-Man* gameplay was also tweaked subtly. New bonus items were introduced into the game and Pac-Man could now chomp and reap the beneficial side effects of two pill types, one that made him momentarily invulnerable and another performance-enhancing drug that helped to increase his speed.

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22





The Last Ninja

■ **Year:** 1987
■ **Publisher:** System 3

No isometric list is complete without a mention of System 3's great ninja series, so here's the original. While we accept that the promised PSP game is unlikely to appear, at least Armakuni's first outing is available on Nintendo's Virtual Console.

Granted, the combat feels a bit clunky and archaic, but the well-crafted isometric visuals still impress, even if the animation isn't as impressive as we remember.

Luckily, *The Last Ninja's* excellent and well-thought-out gameplay remains readily apparent and while we'd have preferred more focus on puzzle solving, the tasks available still require a fair amount of head scratching to complete.

Followed by several excellent sequels, the original remains an excellent alternative to the isometric platformers/adventures that were all the rage back in the day and it is still an essential addition to the C64's catalogue.





Civilization II

■ **Year:** 1996

■ **Publisher:** MicroProse

Regarded by many as the high point of the series, *Civilization II* continued the original's leanings, enabling players to forge an empire via a mixture of meddlesome micromanagement and wanton violence, wiping out weaker civilisations dotted around the map, or 'convincing' them to join your club by allying with you. However, this time everything was in glorious isometric-o-vision (instead of a top-down viewpoint), providing an extra layer of realism to the world at war. Immense scope, expansion packs, highly amusing emissary animations and that 'just one more go' factor make this one of gaming's true classics, and it still largely works on modern PC systems, too.





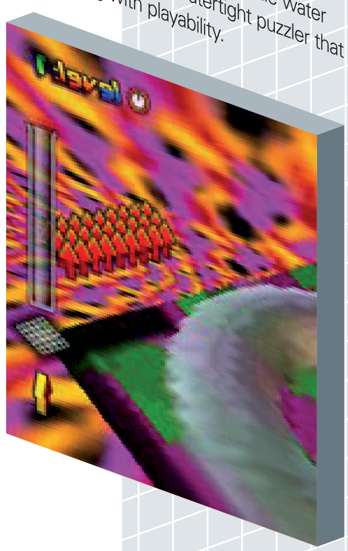


Wetrix

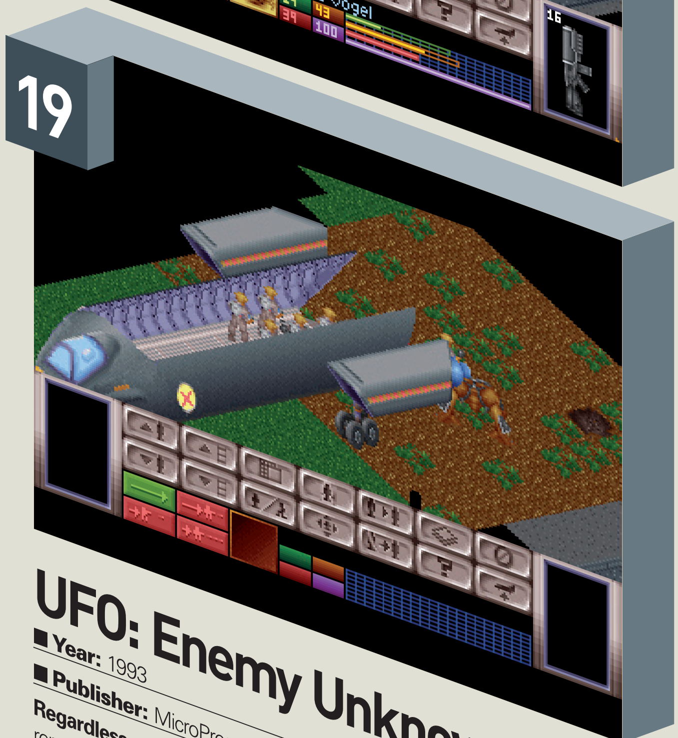
■ **Year:** 1998

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

The Pickford Brothers' puzzle classic was a great-looking isometric variation of *Tetris*. Played out on a flat plot of land, your mission was simple: keep your head above water. With various shaped land masses – made up of uppers that raise the land or downers that slump the land – cascading down the screen, interspersed with large baubles of water droplets, your aim was to contain the water and prevent it from spilling over and topping the hydrometer at the right of the screen. To help fight the problematic precipitation, falling meteorites would soak the water up, while nuclear warheads would deform your earthy vessels. Wonderful looking, and with superb and tactile water effects, *Wetrix* was a watertight puzzler that was dripping with playability.







UFO: Enemy Unknown

■ **Year:** 1993

■ **Publisher:** MicroProse

Regardless of what format you play it on, Julian Gollop's *UFO: Enemy Unknown* remains an amazing strategy game that easily gains its place in our prestigious list.

It was never much of a looker, but the real beauty of *Enemy Unknown* is in how well Gollop implemented everything, and even now it boasts dazzling presentation, challenging AI and well-designed maps that put many similar games to shame.

The alien forces are a constant challenge for the player and require you to really think about and plan out each and every move, but help is at hand thanks to the ability to hire various helpers – ranging from scientists to soldiers – purchase a variety of weaponry and equipment and expand your base or build new ones.



But, don't be put off by the turn-based strategy, for it remains just as exciting as any RTS that you'll have ever played. A true isometric classic.





Planescape: Torment

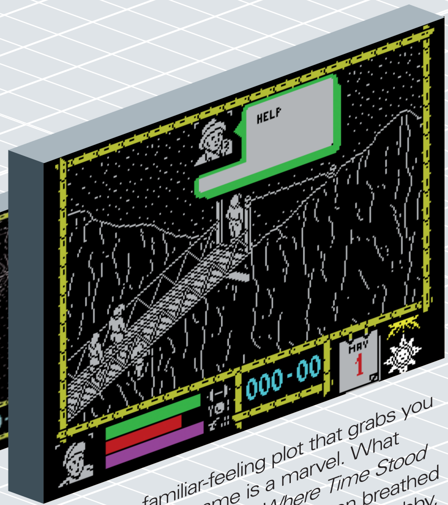
■ **Year:** 1999
■ **Publisher:** Interplay

It's a shame that most of the **Retro Gamer** freelancers don't share the same love for *Planescape: Torment* as Darran and regular contributor Craig Ritchie do, as Black Isle Studios' RPG is easily one of the greatest games of all time. Despite its tacky amnesia-afflicted hero, you soon discover one of the best-scripted plots to ever grace a computer game.

Forget *Zelda*, forget *Final Fantasy*, forget *Shining Force* – there is a gravitas to *Torment* that makes the storylines of other role-playing games look like the fantasies of a 12-year-old. *Torment* comes with an important message, but it also happens to be amazingly structured, boasts a host of genuinely interesting characters – with Mort the floating skull ironically being the most fleshed out – and some truly stunning sequences.

Planescape: Torment is quite possibly one of the greatest games ever created, let alone the best use of the Dungeons & Dragons licence. The fact that it doesn't receive more recognition is nothing short of criminal.



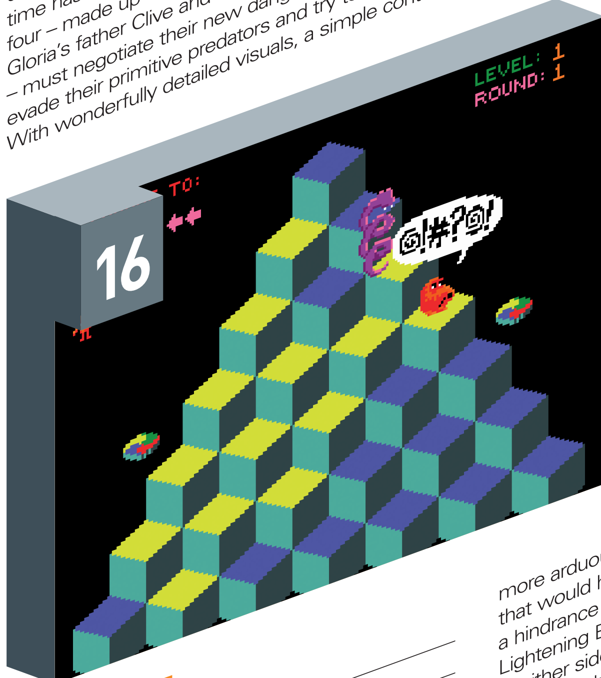


Where Time Stood Still

■ **Year:** 1988
■ **Publisher:** Ocean

Knowing it was on to a good thing with *The Great Escape*, Denton Designs set about taking its prison escape game, keeping the lose filmic narrative, and adding more characters, locales and plenty more surprises. Exquisite looking, *Where Time Stood Still* drew you into a wonderful primordial world teeming with bloodthirsty cannibals and even bloodthirstier dinosaurs. After crash-landing into a world where time has been seemingly neglected, our party of four – made up of newlyweds Dirk and Gloria, Gloria's father Clive and led by steadfast pilot Jarret – must negotiate their new dangerous surroundings, evade their primitive predators and try to stay alive. With wonderfully detailed visuals, a simple control interface and a familiar-feeling plot that grabs you from the get-go, the game is a marvel. What really impresses most about *Where Time Stood Still* is the amount of personality Denton breathed into each character. Clive is depicted as a chubby, pretty useless waste of sprites, a rotund ball and chain, if you will, and Dirk becomes wildly nervy if Gloria, his wife, tragically snuffs it. You get a sense that these are real people with actual relationships, quirks and foibles. And the feeling that any one of them could be snapped away from you at any point, courtesy of a circling pterodactyl, added an immense amount of tension to the game.

It's a brilliant device that shovels in this sense of impending and inescapable doom and pushes you further on to try to discover its dramatic outcome.

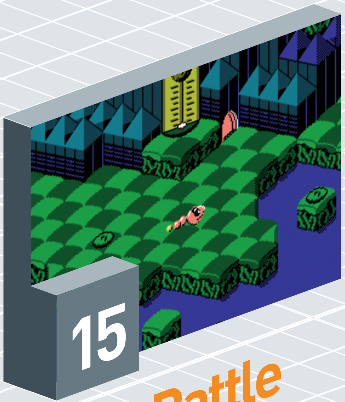




Q*Bert

■ **Year:** 1982
■ **Publisher:** Gottlieb/Mystar

Q*Bert was a hugely successful title for Gottlieb, a company who at the time was famed for making pinball machines. Its bizarre premise found a cussing ball of hairy orange nostril trying to give an Escher-style pyramid of cubes a respray with his feet. Starting at the top of the pyramidal game grid, Q*Bert's task is simply to hop on to every tile to change it into the same uniformed Pantone reference. Making Bert's mission slightly more arduous was a comical roster of enemies that would hop on to the cubes and either prove a hindrance to his plight or deadly to touch. Lightening Bert's load were flying discs – that sat at either side of the pyramid – which would rocket him up to the summit of the pyramid and allow him to restart his descent and avoid the dangers. *Q*Bert*, along with Sega's *Zaxxon*, were two of the first isometric games ever created. Here sits one of the true granddaddies of the genre, a game that is still hugely playable today. Oh and, probably unsurprisingly, the pinball machine's not bad either.



15

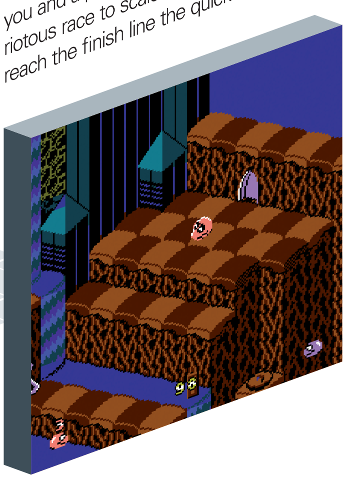
Snake Rattle 'N' Roll

Year: 1991
Publisher: Nintendo

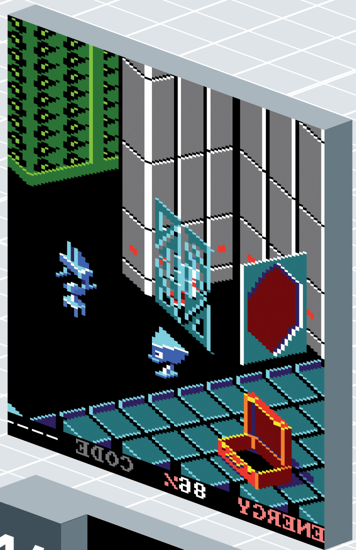
By their very nature, isometric games tend to suffer when it comes to intuitive controls – the 45-degree perspective generally means that north becomes northeast and south becomes southwest, and negotiating perilous environments teeming with dangers and pitfalls becomes problematic. For this reason, *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* has the power to appease and frustrate in equal measure.

With a premise that is as keenly capricious as it is simple – help a continually famished snake make his way up a mountain in order to reach the moon – the game is wonderfully easy to get a handle on; it's essentially *Marble Madness* but ascending instead of descending. With a mountain face divided into individual stages, your mission was to help your snake gorge on enough Nibbley Pibbleys to top the bar on a set of weighing scales and open an exit to the next stage.

Adding to this premise was a cast of brilliantly arbitrary foes – snapping toilet seats and stamping feet – to make your job all the more taxing. Bolstering the game's brilliance was a fantastically ferocious two-player mode, which found you and a pal partaking in a tense and riotous race to scale the mountain and reach the finish line the quickest.









14

Get Dexter

Year: 1986
Publisher: PSS

Get Dexter is a game that should be familiar to CPC owners. It is often touted by complete idiots as being the only reason to actually own an Amstrad. Written by French author Remi Herbulot, *Get Dexter* employed a *Head Over Heels*-style buddy dynamic to its action. Rather than Head you got Dexter, an android that looks like he's ready for bed, and rather than Heels, you got Scooter, a foot with a head screwed on to it. Always controlling one half of the dynamic duo (Dexter), the player must negotiate a heavily guarded installation base to glean eight codes from eight doddering professors located somewhere in the base. Once the profs are found, the player had to work out how to wheedle a numerical code from them, access a supercomputer, save Dexter's species, and finish the game. Written in the Amstrad's Mode 0, which allowed the machine to paint with an astonishing 16 colours, the graphics push the machine close to its limits, and despite its crammed screens, size of the game, and visual richness, it retains an impressive fluidity. *Get Dexter* is epic in feel and regarded as a real CPC milestone.



13



» *D/Generation* simply doesn't get the recognition it rightly deserves, which is a complete mystery to us.

D/Generation

Year: 1992
Publisher: Mindscape

While certainly nothing to really gawp at – Amiga owners, show this game to one of your Atari ST-owning pals from back in the day and watch as they laugh themselves into a complete coma – what this isometric puzzler clearly lacks in aesthetics it more than makes up for in atmosphere and gameplay. Wonderfully simple to grasp, thanks to its brilliant melding of arcade and puzzle action (and there's plenty of both in this title), *D/Generation* sadly went pretty much unnoticed by Amiga owners on its release. Playing the role of a cybernetic postman, your mission was to climb to the very top of a research facility and deliver a vital payload. It certainly sounds simple enough… and it would've been if it wasn't for the swarms of hideous mutant creatures that had broken free from their cages and began overrunning the building (bummer). Consequently, your mission became a perilous race to crack the puzzles, dispose of the mutants. Sometimes cordon them off, and save the cowering blue-collar workers. Wonderfully playable, and with a difficulty curve you could set your watch by, this shamefully forgotten classic is an absolute must-play for any fans of the action/puzzle genre.





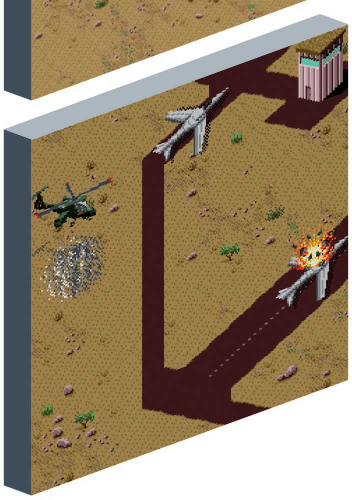
12 Desert Strike

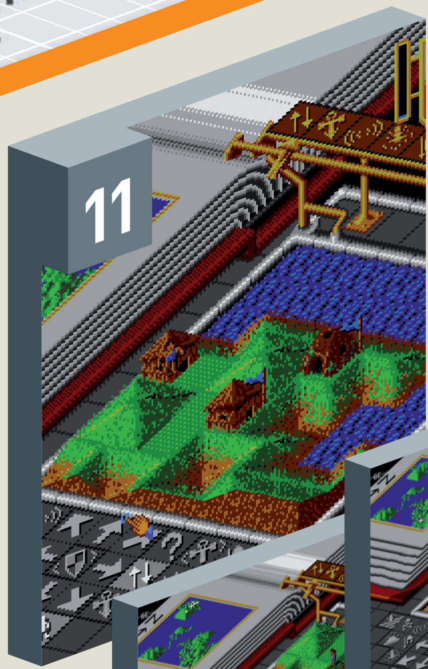
■ **Year:** 1993
■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts

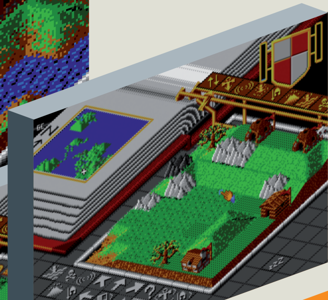
Influenced by Choplifter's gameplay and the notion of toy-box warfare, the *Strike* series marked a shift in console and strategy gaming. *Desert Strike*, the first title in the five-game series, displayed the qualities of something you'd commonly expect to see being played on a desktop. But *Strike* quickly became the thinking-man's blaster on consoles thanks to its keen balancing of chaotic arcade action and subtle strategy elements that were cleverly fused into this action. The stylish and wonderfully detailed looking visuals – resembling Matchbox toys – faultless presentation, and deep and engrossing gameplay gifted the series a huge following. And despite the incredulous media outcry the game attracted, for the notion that it was somehow glorifying warfare, the series quickly won critics over and has remained a popular and revered series even today.



» Though controversial, the *Strike* series has always been massively popular among gamers.









11 Populous

■ **Year:** 1989
■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts

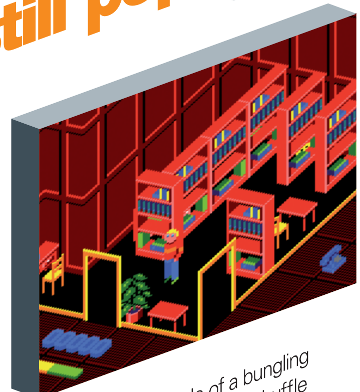
Famous for being one of the first God sims (Don Daglow's 1982 Intellivision title *Utopia* beats it by a good seven years), Bullfrog's *Populous* remains a truly fantastic little strategy outing that still manages to enthuse you with a maniacal sense of ultimate power.

Recently released in the US for the DS, *Populous* is still an excellent multiplayer experience – all Bullfrog games were always created as a multiplayer title first, with the single-player elements being added afterwards – and while many later titles improved on the original format, we constantly find ourselves returning to *Populous's* simplistic isometric world.

Indeed, watching your followers going about their business is as endearing as it ever was, while being able to shape the world to your own choosing still delivers an impressive amount of freedom. *Populous* is a by-product of Bullfrog's genius during the mid-Eighties and late-Nineties and it's a testament to the company's creativity that it remains one of the most influential god sims of all time.

"The Strike series quickly won critics over and is still popular even today"



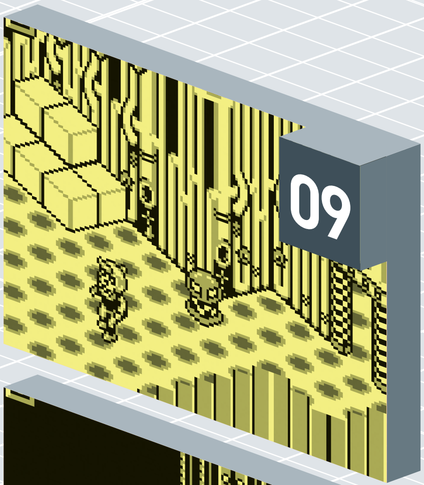


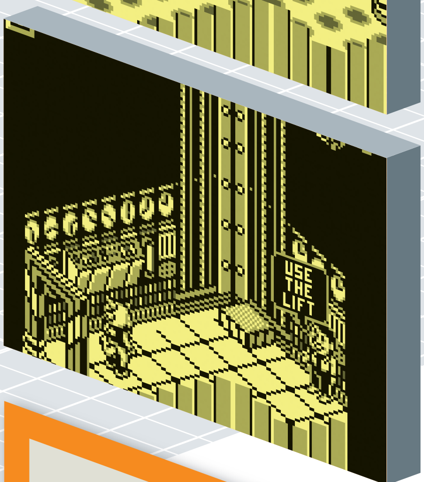


10 Inside Outing

■ **Year:** 1988
■ **Publisher:** The Edge

A firm favourite at **Retro Gamer**, *Inside Outing* is a lavish-looking isometric puzzler that drips style, oozes quality and smothers you with a niceness pillow. In many ways it could be said that the game is essentially *Jet Set Willy* in faux 3D and swivelled 45 degrees. Playing the role of a bungling blond-haired burglar, you must shuffle around a lovingly ornate and colourful mansion to sweep up valuables, while also avoiding the deadly touch of windup mice and flapping canaries. What made *Inside Outing* so charming is the sheer amount of interaction that occurs between you, your character and the environment. *Inside Outing* offers a solid world to explore, discover and run amok in, which makes cracking the brilliantly quirky puzzles and progression a wonderfully enjoyable experience. Furniture could be moved around, a cluttered wardrobe of items could be used to great effect and there was also a brilliantly arbitrary feel to the game that makes it so enticing. *Inside Outing* is a real 8-bit classic that every puzzle fan should take the time to discover.







09

Monster Max

■ **Year:** 1994

■ **Publisher:** Titus Software

Released seven years after *Head Over Heels*, *Monster Max* was a monochrome masterpiece that proved programmer Jon Ritman and artist Bernie Drummond's fertile pairing hadn't waned after a hiatus. It is the pair's final game together – which could be why it also feels like their most polished game. Released solely for the Game Boy, *Monster Max* was a sprawling and wonderful-looking isometric platform/puzzle game. Stretching a colossal 600 locations, each one bigger than those in *Head Over Heels*, the game is truly massive. You play Monster Max, a rock guitarist monster armed with a stringed axe, who must traverse a huge collection of wonderfully detailed looking rooms to lift a music ban that's been imposed on his planet. Sadly, despite its brilliance, polish and favourable review scores, many people failed to shell out for the game, and as a result it has become an underplayed classic that any self-respecting Game Boy collector should own.



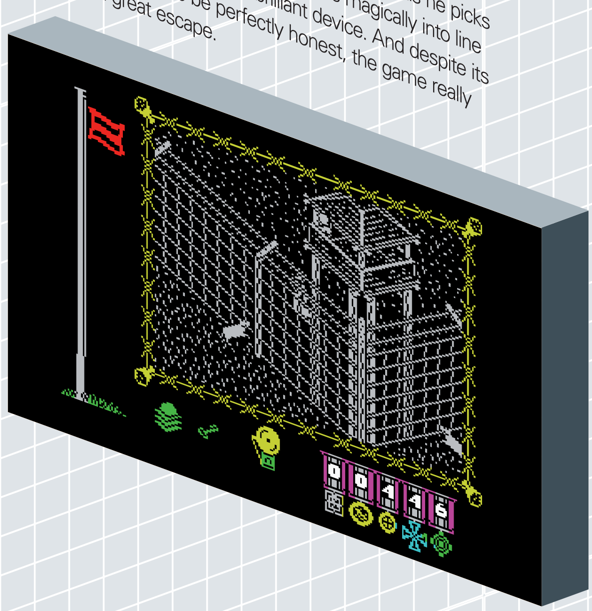
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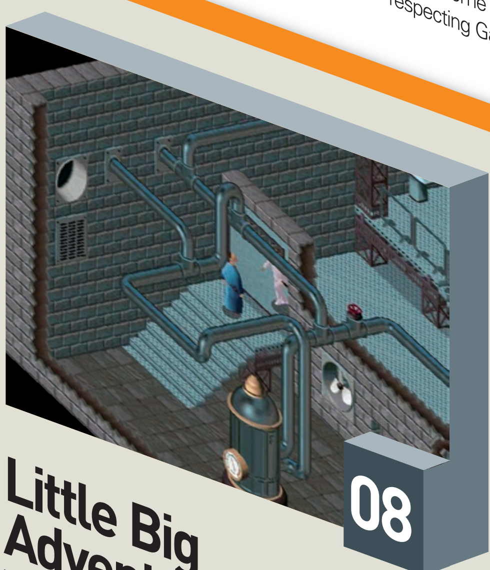
The Great Escape

■ **Year:** 1988

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

It's ironic that one of the best movie tie-in videogames ever created really had little to do with the source material (but, to be frank, that's really neither here nor there). Inspired by the WWII movie of the same name, Denton Design's seminal Spectrum classic found gamers forced to partake in a daily and monotonous monochrome routine of exercise, breakfast and roll calls. Playing the role of an incarcerated POW, it fell to you to help keep our hero on the right side of his Nazi captors while helping him obtain the right items to plot his escape – there were a number of ways you could do this incidentally. Moving along at a skulking pace, *The Great Escape* radiates atmosphere. The ability to wander off and cause your hero a mischief, or leave him on his lonesome and watch as he picks up the reigns of the game himself and falls magically into line of his own doing, was simply a brilliant device. And despite its harrowing backdrop, to be perfectly honest, the game really did provide a great escape.









08

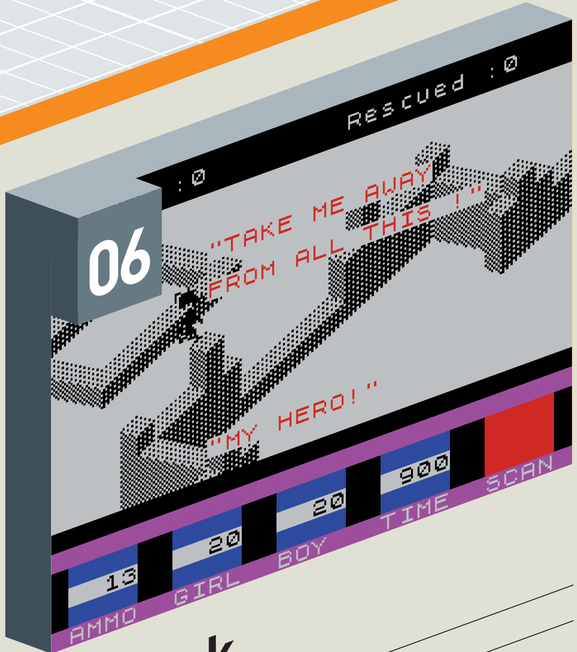
Little Big Adventure

■ **Year:** 1997

■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts

Curtailed trilogies aren't uncommon happenings in this industry – *Advent Rising*, *Shenmue* and *Little Big Adventure* all have final instalments either dead or on life support. *Little Big Adventure* began life as a 3D role-playing game for the SNES and was said to make use of the machine's Super FX chip, but development of the game moved across to the PC and PSone where it garnered impressive review scores on both platforms. The game melded arcade action, role-playing elements and sandbox gameplay brilliantly. It also had puzzle elements that feel inspired by the Stampers' *Knight Lore*, whereby selecting the right emotional state of your character in the right situation was key. Wowing gamers with its Gouraud-shaded 3D models, that didn't look too dissimilar to something you might expect to see pop up in a Pixar movie, its enormity and its wonderfully compelling gameplay, *Little Big Adventure* paid a remarkable homage to the 8-bit iso-puzzlers of the Eighties, and is easily one of the best isometric adventures you can come by.

TOP 25 ISOMETRIC GAMES



06

Ant Attack

■ **Year:** 1984

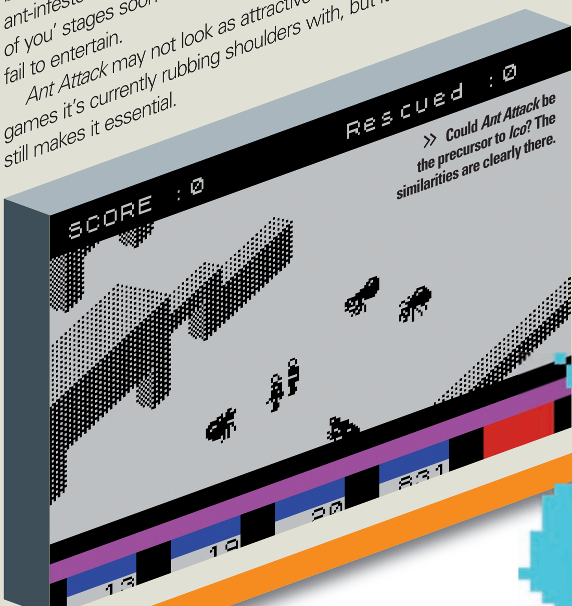
■ **Publisher:** Quicksilva

Recently covered in issue 56 of **Retro Gamer**, Sandy White's sublime *Ant Attack* may not have been the first isometric game off the starting blocks, but it remains one of the most influential. Almost a blueprint for the likes of *Resident Evil* and *Ico* – all three games share scary similarities – exploring Antescher remains a genuinely thrilling experience, with its size, scope and surreal surroundings leaving an everlasting impression on you.

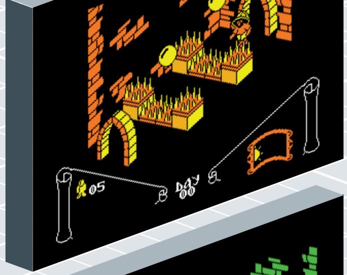
It's also amazingly scary in places, and while it's all too easy to laugh at the primitive – yet strangely beautiful – visuals, when those Lego-like ants start attacking in force, palpable panic quickly sets in and you'll soon start questioning the wisdom of exploring Antescher's abstract world.

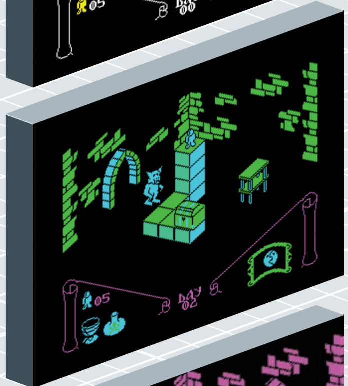
At its root, *Ant Attack* is nothing more than the simple tale of a boy/girl on a mission to rescue their other half and escape from the ant-infested city. Dig deeper, however, and the initial 'they're right in front of you' stages soon become deadly games of cat and mouse that never fail to entertain.

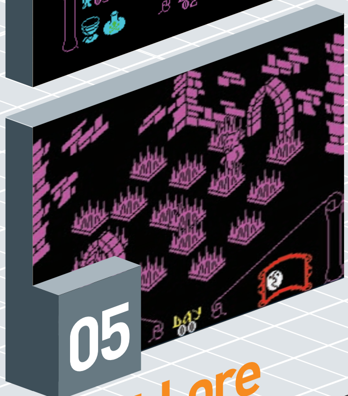
Ant Attack may not look as attractive as some of the other isometric games it's currently rubbing shoulders with, but its absorbing gameplay still makes it essential.



» Could *Ant Attack* be the precursor to *Ico*? The similarities are clearly there.







05

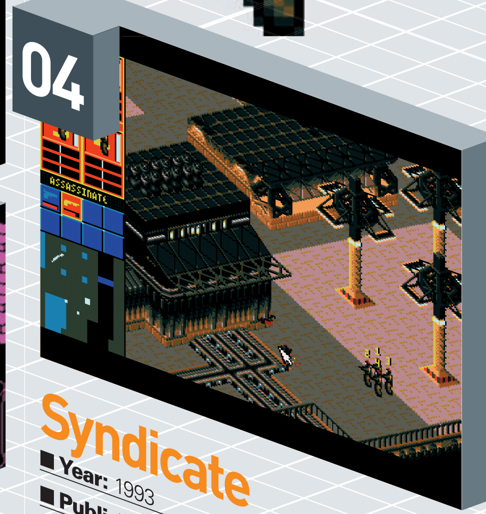
Knight Lore

■ **Year:** 1984

■ **Publisher:** Ultimate Play The Game

While it may not have been the first isometric game ever released on the Spectrum (that honour goes to *Ant Attack*), *Knight Lore* introduced the world to a perennial style of isometric game that influenced legions of developers and spawned many imitators. *Knight Lore* is a true classic of the genre that shot the Stampers, the Ultimate label and its hero Sabreman to stardom. Feeling ahead of its time, the game was held back for six months by the Stamper brothers for fear that if gamers caught a glimpse of its impressive isometric visuals they wouldn't give their other more modern looking titles, *Saber Wulf* and *Underwurlde*, a second glance. *Knight Lore* found players negotiating a wonderfully detailed castle to seek the cure for a terrible bout of lycanthropy, which causes our hero to change from mild-mannered pith-helmeted adventurer by day into a hot-tempered werewolf at night. Your mission was to locate the various ingredients required to concoct the cure within a limited window of just 40 days. As well as varied rooms plied with tricky platform sections, many of *Knight Lore*'s puzzles employed a clever technique that forced gamers to utilise Sabreman's two alter egos inside specific rooms to progress. *Knight Lore* is one of the most popular and important Speccy titles of all time, which is why it finds itself sitting high up on this list.





04

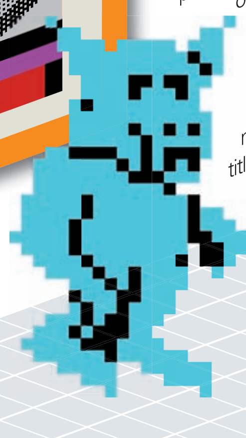
Syndicate

■ **Year:** 1993

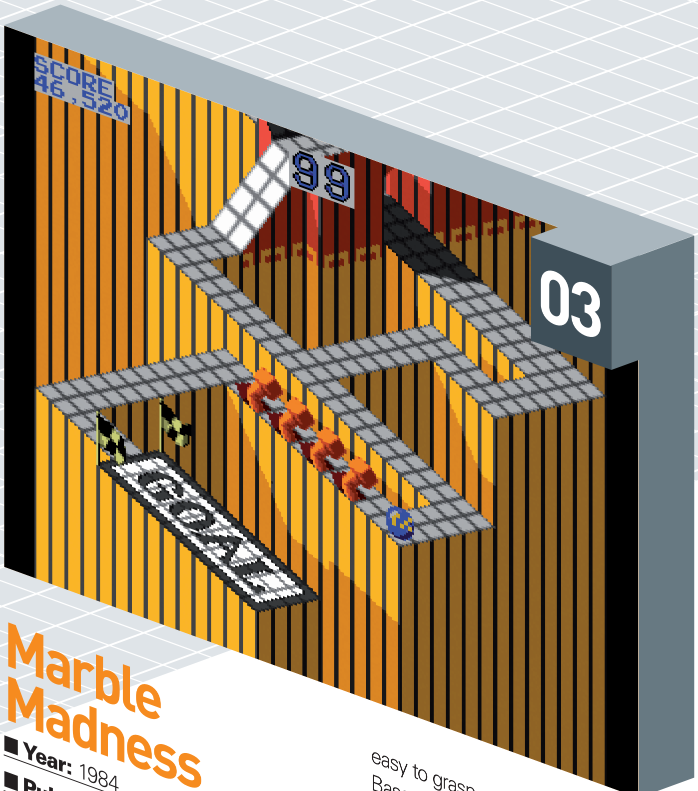
■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts

Bullfrog's futuristic cyberpunk classic pumped two barrels of comic violence on to the screens of Amiga and PC owners in 1993. With themes centring on drugs, terrorism and violence, the game certainly didn't pull its punches. Be it hailing citizens in mini-gun flair, persuading powerful dignitaries to follow you with a quick zap of the Persuadatron, or creating mass panic with the mighty gauss gun, *Syndicate*'s repressive setting and glum futuristic mood provided the perfect playground for many gamers to create a torrent of carnage. Playing a young executive, your mission was to increase the notoriety of your team of agents by exterminating other syndicates on a global and technological battlefield. To give you an edge, with the money that you earned completing missions you could pump money into improving the skills of your agents and upgrading their ordinance. While the game isn't without the odd gameplay niggles – some criticise the game for being too difficult (we strongly urge these people to give the brilliant *American Revolt* expansion pack a wide birth), entering buildings obscures the view of your agents (moving them through a building is like fumbling the marble through the maze section in Screwball Scramble), and the fixed camera also proved problematic. Regardless, *Syndicate* felt wonderfully polished, treading a very fine line between shoot-'em-up and strategy.





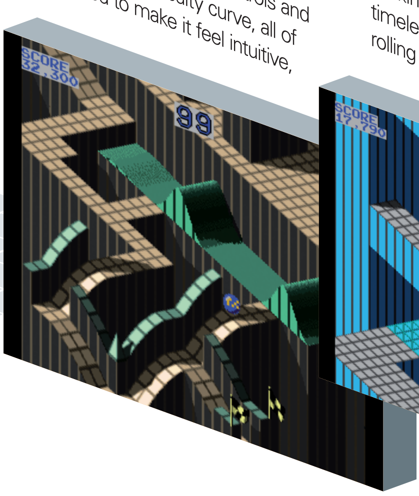
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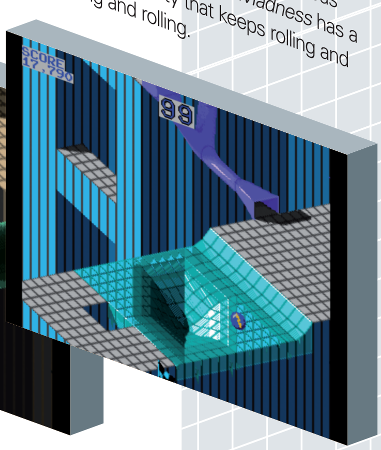


Marble Madness

■ **Year:** 1984
■ **Publisher:** Atari/Midway

When Atari asked its new designer Mark Cerny to come up with a game that married elements of the company's existing portfolio of arcade games, including *Missile Command* and *Tempest*, with a novel control system and a simultaneous two-player mode – which was proving popular among arcadegoers at the time – he set about creating what many would regard as one of the most succinct and tight arcade experiences ever. *Marble Madness*'s mass appeal is quite simply down to the game's ease. It's success was garnered due to Cerny's talent for imaginative level design and the game's intuitive (and commonsensical) trackball controls and fantastically tight difficulty curve, all of which helped to make it feel intuitive, easy to grasp and wonderfully addictive. Based loosely on a mixture of *Miniature Golf* – clearly the inspiration for its track design and snaking contours – and a checkpoint racing game, *Marble Madness* put players in charge of a lowly but brilliantly responsive marble trying to negotiate six tricky tracks plied with trails, pitfalls and enemies to reach the goal at the base of the screen. With each of the six tracks getting more difficult as you progressed, the game may have been short – talented players can finish the game in minutes – but it certainly spins a challenge. Cerny's cunning level design meant the game never became a complete walkthrough. Many of the sections require keen precision and even keener timing, so even a *Marble Madness* pro will often roll into one of the game's infamous sticking points. *Marble Madness* has a timeless quality that keeps rolling and rolling and rolling.

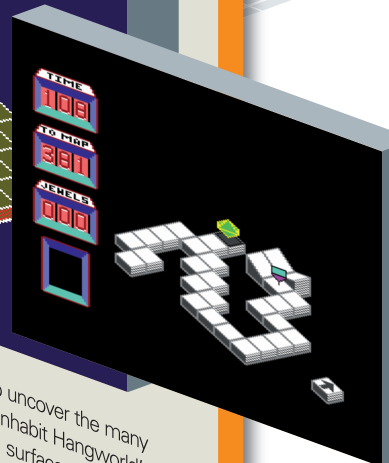




02



» *Spindizzy*, one game guaranteed to send you into a spin.



Spindizzy

■ **Year:** 1986
■ **Publisher:** Electric Dreams

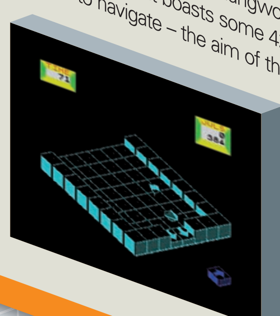
Scoring an impressive 93% when it was reviewed in *Crash* and an insanely high 98% in *Zzap64!*, Paul Shirley's excellent maze game still deserves the high praise that was constantly heaped upon it when it was first released.

Like many isometric games (particularly those on the 8-bit systems), *Spindizzy* retains a refreshingly clean sheen that makes navigating the game's brilliantly designed environments an absolute cinch. It's also surprisingly quick for a home release (hardly surprising when you consider that you're initially up against a fairly tough time limit and you're required to hurtle through many stages in the same insane way that made *Marble Madness* so enjoyable to play though).

While it's probably one of the most arcadey home isometric games we've played, *Spindizzy* is ultimately a game about exploration, and you'll be doing a bloody lot of it if you want to uncover every last inch of Hangworld. Massive in size – it boasts some 429 screens to navigate – the aim of this exploration is to uncover the many diamonds that inhabit Hangworld's starkly beautiful surface. Fortunately, your GERALD (Gyroscopic Environmental Reconnaissance And Land-Mapping Device) is more than equipped to navigate Hangworld's harsh environment, as it's able to change between three distinct forms: a gyroscope, tetrahedron or ball, which greatly affects both your speed and traction.

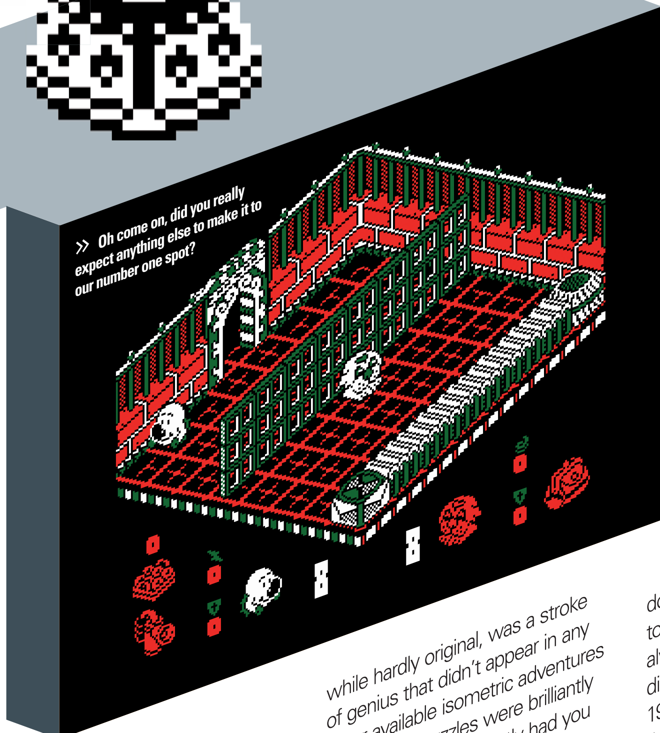
One of the greatest joys of *Spindizzy*, however, is just how well its many puzzles have been created so you can reach those coveted jewels and map Hangworld's surface. Although many sections of the game are nothing more than tricky mazes (the boost button will quickly allow you to navigate many of these with few real concerns), other screens require ridiculous amounts of concentration and extremely deft reflexes in order to acquire those out of reach gems. Then there are the many lifts – that first have to be activated – dotted around Hangworld, which add further complexities to GERALD's quest. While certain elements of *Spindizzy* can be quite infuriating to sit through, it's usually due to you wanting to rush through a certain section rather than any actual design faults on Shirley's part.

Yes, it's rather frustrating in places (there's nothing worse than dropping off into nothingness and losing precious time), and yes, it boasts a difficulty that doesn't make it anywhere near as accessible as many of the other games on our list, and yet we still love *Spindizzy* to bits.





01



» Oh come on, did you really expect anything else to make it to our number one spot?



Head Over Heels

■ **Year:** 1987

■ **Publisher:** Ocean

Oh come on, was anything else really going to stand a chance against the isometric juggernaut that is *Head Over Heels*? Receiving an insane amount of votes from the **Retro Gamer** team, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's place at the top spot as creators of the best isometric game of all time is thoroughly deserved (even if Darran foolishly prefers *Monster Max*).

After the simple elegance of *Batman* (which you'll have no doubt noticed, is strangely absent in our list), expectations were high for Ritman and Drummond's next game and the dynamic duo certainly didn't disappoint. Virtually every aspect of *Head Over Heels* is sensational. The ability to control two characters, while hardly original, was a stroke of genius that didn't appear in any other available isometric adventures at the time; puzzles were brilliantly structured and constantly had you scratching your head; while the graphics were truly mind-blowing and offered a level of intricacy – at the time – that only Ultimate's games were able to match.

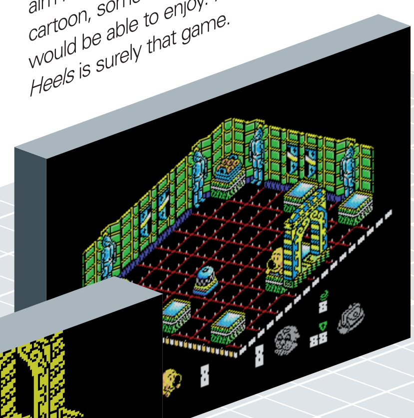
Indeed, it was almost as if Ritman and Drummond had simply scoured the previous six months of review pages and simply created a checklist of essential ingredients that needed to be in *Foot And Mouth* (as it was originally known for some time), so well structured was every aspect of their gigantic 8-bit hit.

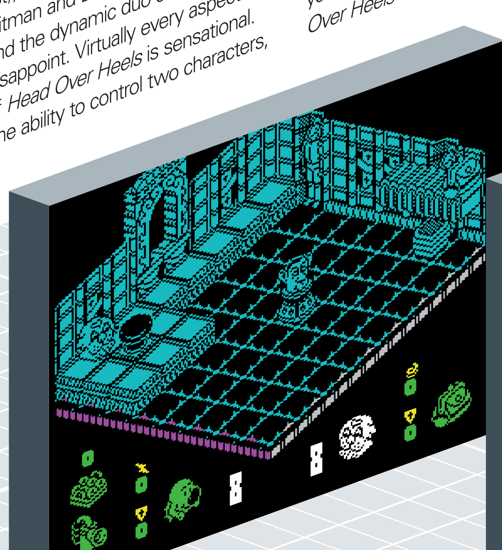
The story of two spies – Headus Mouthion and Footus Underium – who are sent to free the Blacktooth empire, but first get caught and must reunite before saving five worlds, is the stuff of legends and yet we still can't get bored of *Head Over Heels*' fantastic gameplay.

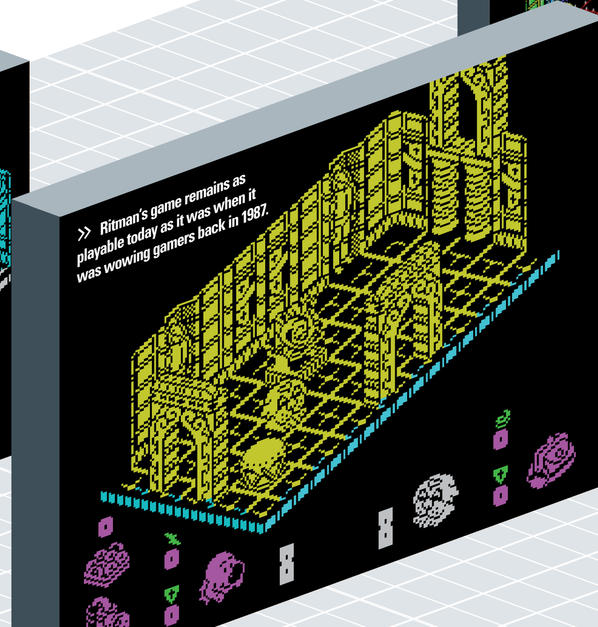
We'll admit that we certainly don't have the skills we once used to possess (Heel's initial escape always seems to give us far more difficulty now than it ever did back in 1987), but once the pair escape to that marketplace the true brilliance of Ritman's game really opens up and you'll be treated to some of the most fiendishly designed puzzles to ever grace an isometric platformer. Whether you're sending off Head to negotiate some tricky pillars or using Heels' speed to get past those damn annoying conveyor belts, you're constantly impressed by the way everything combines in order to create a beautifully cohesive whole. There's an organic feel to *Head Over Heels* that still seems to elude a great many similar games and it's amazing to think that this age-old classic is fast approaching its 22nd birthday, so fresh does it still feel.

Even if *Head Over Heels* didn't feature expertly crafted gameplay, meticulously designed levels and those magnificent puzzles, we're still betting it remains in many gamers' memories due to its sheer wackiness. Boasting levels of surrealism that wouldn't look out of place on *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, Bernie Drummond's marvellously designed sprites feature a strangeness that was typically British and a stylish cartoony look that only Ultimate was usually able to better. The miniature creations of *Batman* were impressive, but the sprites of *Head Over Heels* were on a whole new level and are arguably some of Drummond's finest work. Exceptionally detailed and chock-full of character, the crazy denizens that Head and Heels have to avoid are just as memorable as the game's stars and it's all down to the talented work of Drummond.

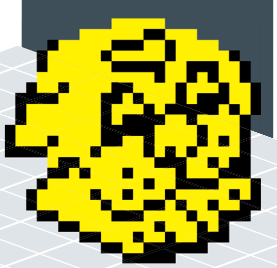
Ritman recently told us that his aim had been to create an interactive cartoon, something that every gamer would be able to enjoy. *Head Over Heels* is surely that game.



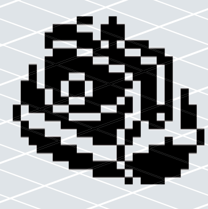


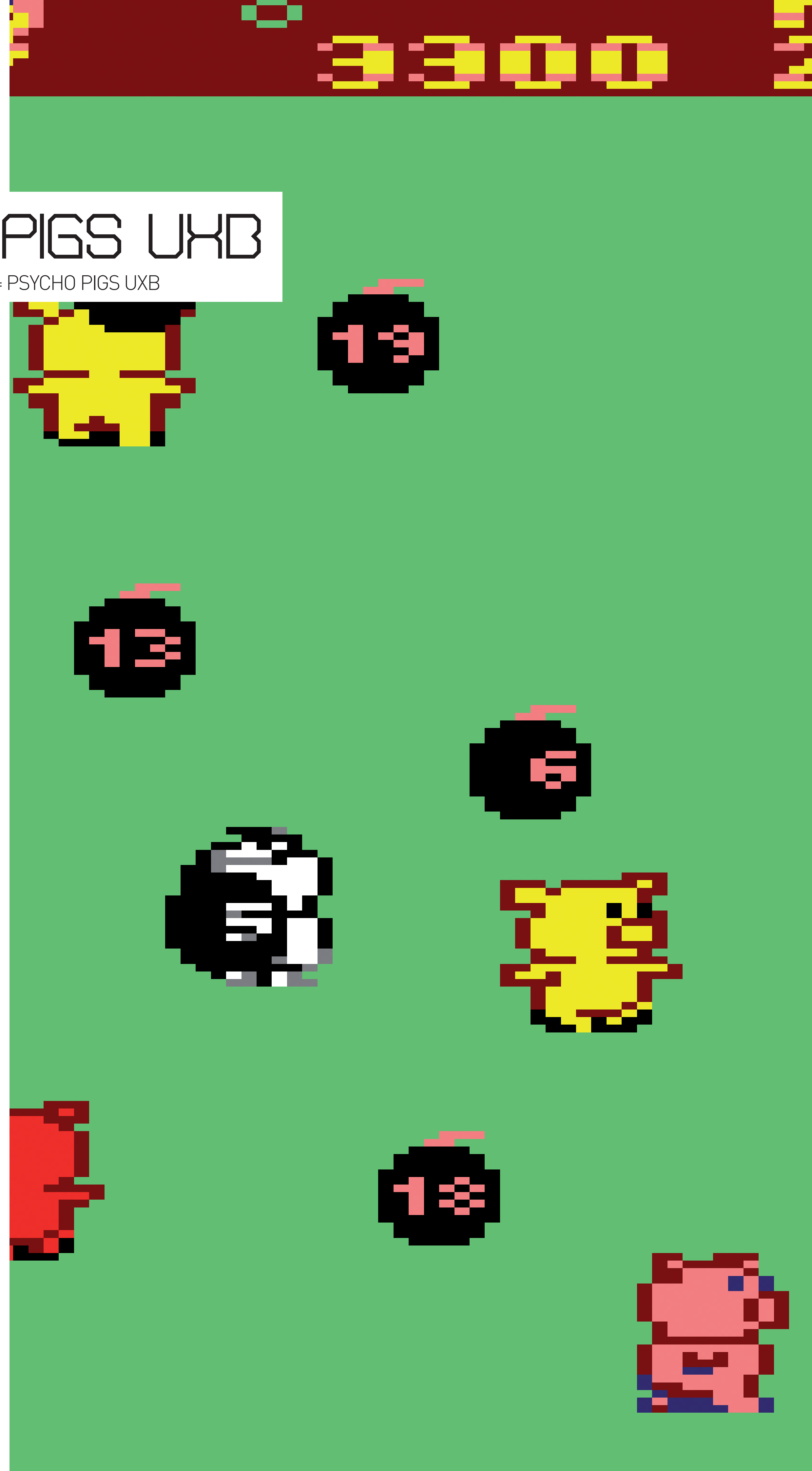


» Ritman's game remains as playable today as it was when it was wowing gamers back in 1987.









PSYCHO PIGS UXB

BOMBERMAN + DODGEBALL = PSYCHO PIGS UXB



- **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** FUTURISTIC DEATH SPORT
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** CPC
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



HISTORY

***Psycho Pigs UXB* is a bizarre action game based on a bizarre arcade game from Jaleco that was titled *Pigs And Bombers*, which, in the tradition of bizarre arcade action games, never actually found a release outside of Japan.**

The premise of the game is so simple that it actually fits quite cutely into a standfirst (see above). If you require a more visual description of the game then imagine you and your friends are pigs. Now envisage that you and your friends love dodgeball. Now imagine you want to blow all your friends up, so in a bid to liven up proceedings you decide to replace your tools of combat with weapons of mass destruction. Welcome to the head-spinning world of *Psycho Pigs* – one glowing satsuma-orange presenter away from being *Smash T.V.* meets *Pets Win Prizes*.

After a brief intro screen, showing one of the various multicoloured piglets strutting on to the screen like eager and porky contestants on some kind of futuristic game show – but with their identities replaced by a random foible like cowardly, obstinate and testy – the action begins.

A snout-faced referee wearing a leather mask blows on his little whistle and all the pigs scuttle around the screen trying to lob bombs at each other, while the ref chucks more ammo into the arena. The winner of the competition is the last pig standing. To help shovel in more tension, each bomb displays a timer showing how long remains before it goes bang. With each passing stage, the difficulty, volume of pigs and bombs, and speed of gameplay will increase, and it doesn't take long for the action to get ferocious. To soften the difficulty, certain pigs will drop power-ups when they explode, some of which will increase your speed, add points to your score, or, in some kind of weird send up to *Bubble Bobble*, suit your pig in a blue dinosaur costume to give you an extra hit.

Psycho Pigs is a bizarre game that's so wonderfully simple to grasp, and, because of this, it quickly grows annoyingly addictive. Right, who's got the pork scratchings?


12
20
13

HIGH SCORE

PAC-MAN

HUNGRY FOR DOTS? SICK OF GETTING SPOOKED? LET PAC MANIAC JON STOODLEY SHOW YOU HOW TO EAT IT UP THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

So you know the half-truth about Pac-Man being based on a pizza with a slice removed, the changing of the original title, '*Puck Man*', for fear that foul-mouthed kids would change that P to an F, and you can recite the lyrics to Buckner & Garcia's million-selling pop hit *Pac-Man Fever*.

You probably also know that the maximum score possible on *Pac-Man* is 3,333,360, but you may not know what a strange task the 'Perfect Game' is. The first 21 screens require patient ghost grouping, so you can consume every one of the monsters. Then you have a four-hour slog of running the same pattern through the next 234 screens, an arduous chore known as 'crossing the desert', before you reach the surreal oasis of the split screen.

Billy Mitchell completed the journey first on 3 July 1999 and has been followed by four others since. Without wanting to take anything away from these exceptional accomplishments, all have been achieved since the advent of MAME in 1997, without which it's hard to see how the intricacies of the split screen could have been fathomed. Jon's best is the highest officially recorded score of the golden age, before the luxury of level advancement and the like. Respect due.



» Jon in front of the *Pac-Man* machine at Funspot arcade.

THE EXPERT

The split screen would come later – it was the twin screen that first seduced him. "These huge crates arrived in the arcade," says Jon Stoodley of the summer's day in 1981 when *Pac-Man* landed in Liverpool's Las Vegas arcade. "Inside were two machines, with a second screen above so people could watch. It was like a magnet. You'd get a crowd. That's what drew me in."

That and a little sibling rivalry. His older brother was soon scoring over 100K and not to be outdone, Jon switched from his previous game of choice, *Berzerk*, and concentrated on dot devouring. He reached a plateau, however, on discovering that those handy power pills don't work after screen 21 and needed to take a step back. Literally.

"I was in the arcade one Saturday in mid-1982 and there was a big crowd watching the screen above," remembers Jon. "This American guy had 600,000, which was considered impossible. On the 9th Key screen, Pac-Man slows down but the ghosts stay the same speed and you can't use the power pills so you need a special pattern, which this guy clearly had. Everyone was transfixed. I stood there for well over an hour. I integrated some of his patterns into mine and that was a real turning point."

Jon took his gameplay to the next level thanks to this mysterious US player and soon his scores were in excess of 2 million, but he needed one last bit of encouragement to make the final push. A school friend had read in *C&VG* magazine that Stateside *Pac-Man* addicts had reputedly reached the end of the game, the mystical 'split screen'.

So, the plucky 14 year old, armed with 10p, a blue *C&VG* submission form for its high-score competition and a determination to get to screen 256, headed to Las Vegas arcade one boiling hot Sunday in June 1983. Five hours later, Jon had his epiphany. "I was like, 'woah, what's this!' It must have taken a few seconds for it to dawn on me that this was the split screen. My 9th Key pattern moves to the right at the start of each screen, which took me straight into the gobbledegook and I got gobbled up. Game over!"

His massive tally of 3,221,000 did indeed grace the pages of *C&VG*, though not until the following summer as an incentive for the magazine's annual high-score challenge, and, by that time, Jon and the world of gaming had moved on. It wasn't until almost a quarter of a century later that Jon decided to try to seek out proof of that monumental score. He ended up buying a MAME cab from *Missile Command* champ Tony 'TT' Temple, who also helped him track down the issue of *C&VG* that verified his achievement and Jon is very much back in the maze.

"I'll beat my old score, live at Funspot, on the machine that Billy Mitchell did the perfect game on," he says. "I'm determined not to use any strategies from the net or use save states, pause mode or rack advancing that MAME allows. I'll do it the old-fashioned way.'

You'll read it here first, folks.

THE KNOWLEDGE

"My first tip is you must practice being 'corner perfect'. Really concentrate on your technique. The slightest hesitation, especially on the 9th Key, will tell the program that you are running a different pattern and that's why so many games end in a pattern breakdown. Try to pre-empt the upcoming corner by moving the joystick just before the corner. As soon as Pac-Man moves in the desired direction, again, move the joystick in the next desired direction, and so on.

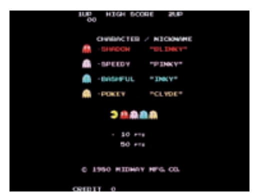
Remember the 'lure spots' on the board. These are brief safe havens for you to group some ghosts or hide to collect your thoughts.

In **Fig 1**, any ghost which is following you down that straight channel will continue down, as the Pink one does here, and when there are three or more, they will circle the power pill and you may follow them in order to eat the pill and score more points. You can practice this on both sides.

Fig 2 shows another lure spot. The ghosts think they have you and continue in the up

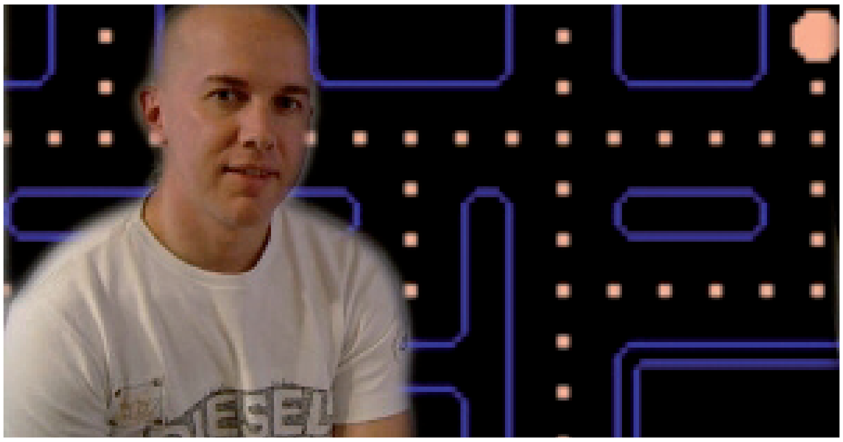
HIGH SCORE NEWS

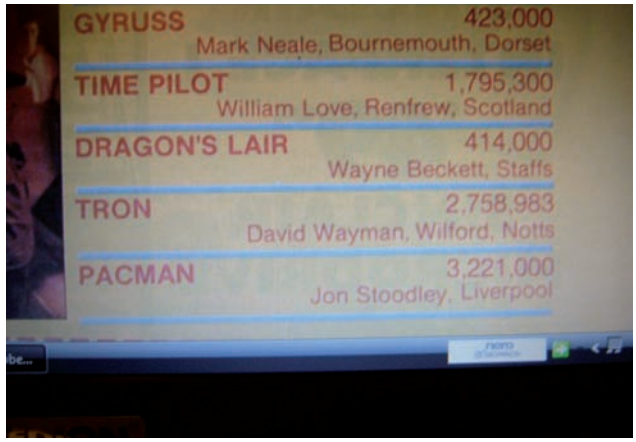
November's annual gathering of classic gamers at Funspot in New Hampshire, USA, saw some impressive scores and a little intrigue, too. Tony Temple pushed his *Missile Command* tournament record to over 2.2 million. "I reckon I was about 30 screens short of reaching screen 255/256," he said. "After that, the difficulty resets, opening up the possibility of a score over 4 million." Donald Hayes increased his *Joust* record to over 1.4m, having recently retaken the *Frogger* crown with 698,850. "Costanza is next!" he said, referring to George's 860K featured in *Seinfeld*. And for those intimidated by big scores, why not try to match Eric Ahlers' *Pac-Man* performance: scoring zero after playing through all his lives. Harder than it sounds. Most interesting though was the arrival of *Lady Bug* champ Dwayne Richard, who turned up with a camera to film his rebuttal to *King Of Kong*. Allegedly, he has evidence that Steve Wiebe's million-plus score on *Donkey Kong* was achieved on a doctored board. Maybe it isn't game over for that tale quite yet…



» The title screen for the North American version. When the red ghost speeds up after so many dots have been eaten he is unofficially known as Cruise Elroy, trivia fans.




» By day, he's an authorised firearms officer with the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. By night, he chomps pills and listens to repetitive beats.



» Jon Stoodley's score as it appeared in the hallowed pages of *C&VG*.



» **Fig 1** Get ready to group.



» **Fig 2** Check your peripheral vision.



» **Fig 3** Have a break…

"I WILL BEAT MY OLD SCORE ON THE MACHINE THAT BILLY MITCHELL DID THE PERFECT GAME ON AND I'LL DO IT THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY" JON KEEPS IT OLD-SCHOOL

direction. They will do this several times. Be aware of the other ghosts' positions and use your peripheral vision well. This is a good way for grouping on most boards.

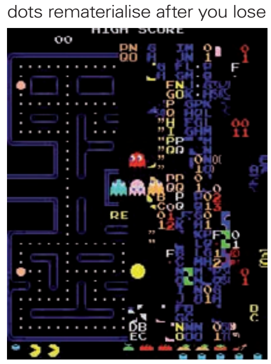
Fig 3 shows where to head for (from below) if pursued in the bottom half of the board. The ghosts cannot follow you up here. You can switch from either side of the 'T' in order to group or, more importantly, escape. This is also true above the 'Ghost Box', where the eyes from an eaten ghost run to in order to re-incarnate back to a ghost. It's the same on both sides of the 'T' and I use it as a 'sit spot' on my 9th Key pattern for a rest.

In the early boards, remember to clear the long straight run at the bottom from the outset. This is probably the most dangerous point as there are so many directions that the ghosts can come from to catch you. I wouldn't worry about clearing all (or most) of the dots early on. Although the ghosts are relatively slow here, grouping is pretty straightforward. Big tip here – forget about being perfect. Most modern players are obsessed about the perfect game, or eating as many ghosts as possible, only to bump into a ghost as they change back from blue. Yes, you must concentrate on point pressing, but survival and utilising all your men will give you a big score. Leave the perfect dream to later on.

Here are two links. The first, http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=h4lGuEiiu9Q has some pointers for ghost grouping. The second, http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=ctLLPD6OVdY is my 9th Key pattern, which is 25 years old! It's pretty stable but like any pattern, requires a corner perfect technique. Feel free to use anything. Best of luck to you all and, who knows, in the future you could be up in the top ten on Twin Galaxies' *Pac-Man* arcade listings. Honestly, if I can do it, so can you with some dedication. Let's keep the classics going."

LET'S SPLIT

Once you've struggled through the preceding 255 screens, the split screen still poses a unique challenge. As well as clearing the half of the screen still intact, you must venture into the mess on the right. Somewhere in there are nine dots, of which four are hidden (you can tell when you've eaten them by the sound effect). Strangely, these dots rematerialise after you lose a life, meaning you must sacrifice each of your remaining lives and repeat your run through the randomness on the right to gobble up those nine point-giving dots. So, is it possible to complete the split screen? No… and yes. The game counts how many dots Pac-Man has eaten on each screen and when it reaches 244, it knows to progress to the next level. Even with the reappearing dots, there aren't enough to finish the screen, but if you set MAME to infinite lives, you can reach the magic number and the game rolls over to the first screen. But that's cheating, right?


» A mess to some, the Holy Grail to others…



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

ACCOLADE

Achieving great success during the Eighties, Accolade stumbled and fell in the decade beyond. Mike Bevan looks back at the development highlights of the creators of Test Drive and Bubsy

Alan Miller, co-founder of Accolade Inc, refers to the period in a refreshingly glass-is-half-full manner as a 'downturn'. Others have termed it a crash. We're talking, of course, about the infamous industry nosedive of 1983, which shook many console and games software manufacturers to the point of collapse. Alan had been one of the ex-Atari refugees who, along with David Crane, Bob Whitehead and Larry Kaplan, had founded Activision, the first independent game software publisher. Activision had survived the console crunch, but was on its way to posting record losses of $18 million for the following year.

In this worrying climate, Alan Miller and Bob Whitehead decided that the future for the industry lay in disk-based product for home computers, particularly the up-and-coming Commodore 64, rather than the expensive cartridge format of the out-of-favour consoles. Although Activision had a number of original home computer titles in development, the pair felt that the company's mindset was too firmly entrenched in its console roots, with an over-reliance on ports from the Atari 2600. "Activision's strength, pioneering as an independent software game company (from the console manufacturers), became its weakness," explains Bob. "When you've achieved so much success on a specific game system, it's hard to let go of it. We saw a new market, a new challenge, and some better hardware… we wanted to move forward."

Unable to attract outside investment in the current business environment, the duo self-financed their new venture – christened 'Accolade' in order to appear alphabetically before Activision, in the same way their former company had been named to alphabetically precede Atari. Alan reveals that another possible candidate for the company's name had been 'Acclaim'.

The ability to produce and market multiformat software on inexpensive floppy disks, without any licensing issues from hardware manufacturers (Atari had been notoriously lawsuit-happy towards Activision's unlicensed VCS development) would prove a godsend. "The paradigm was shifting for software publishers with this new lower cost of goods and smaller up-front investment," says Bob, "perfect for the austere start-up."

Sheriffs, Starships and Home Runs

Unlike the 'arcade conversion' business model of European software houses such as Ocean, Accolade's focus was quality, original product, developed in-house, or by third-party publishers. Its products would embrace progressively complex and graphically rich gaming themes, intended to appeal to an 'older' market than Activision's. Initially, Bob and Alan wanted to avoid management roles, so a CEO for the company was sought. "I could contribute on the technical side at a higher level than managing, in those early days," explains Bob. "We wanted a good 'front man'." Tom Frisina, a former business associate of Nolan Bushnell, was brought in to serve as company president, and offices were hired in Cupertino, San Jose – the heart of California's Silicon Valley.

INSTANT EXPERT

Formed by Atari and Activision alumni Bob Whitehead and Alan Miller in 1984, Accolade became known for historical and sporting simulations like *Ace Of Aces*, *Hardball*, *Jack Nicklaus Golf* and the *Test Drive* series.

During its start-up phase, Miller and Whitehead created their own games, *Law Of The West* and *Hardball* respectively. Bob Whitehead later created another sports game, *4th & Inches*.

Accolade worked closely with a number of external development studios as publisher, including Artech (*Fight Night*, *Ace Of Aces*, *Apollo 18*), Toys For Bob (*Star Control*) and Horrorsoft (*Elvira: Mistress Of The Dark*, *Waxworks*.)

The Test Drive series was created by Distinctive Software, a Canadian studio founded by Don Mattrick, later becoming EA Canada. Mattrick became president of EA Worldwide, but resigned in 2005, and is now Head of Interactive Entertainment at Microsoft.

Accolade grew to become one of the most commercially successful US games software companies of its day, with annual revenue of $40 million at its peak.

The company's biggest hit was the Sega Mega Drive (Genesis) title *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind*, a platform action game featuring elements inspired by *Sonic The Hedgehog* mixed with Looney Tunes-style humour.



TEST DRIVE 3



Freed of business management duties, the pair continued their 'hands-on' approach of the Activision years, each designing their own launch title. "I'd find myself once in a while spending a weekend knocking out code or playing with a piece of hardware," Bob reveals. "It seems that for whatever reason, my skill set and experience to deal with new technology was more efficient for me to do in a few days than spend the next few weeks and months finding someone else to do it."

Alan Miller's project, *Law Of The West*, cast players in the role of Sheriff in the Old West frontier town of Gold Gulch. "We were interested in emulating other more popular forms of entertainment, such as movies and television," explains Alan. Inspired by the movie *High Noon* and classic Westerns from television, such as *Gunsmoke*, the game mixed adventure elements with hip-shooting gunfights and challenged players to survive intact until sunset rolled around. Gameplay revolved around interacting with the town's citizens, from the buxom saloon owner to the town's drunken doctor, and various low-life pistoleros. Alan implemented a four line, multiple-choice response system, a concept which would later become famous in LucasArts' graphic adventures such as *Monkey Island*.

Bob's game, *Hardball*, was a pioneering baseball simulation, which continued his fascination with sporting themes, as seen in his 2600 games *Football* and *Home Run*. The play screen was inspired by the 'behind the pitcher' (or centerfield) view from TV broadcasts, with a superimposed aerial view of the baseball diamond to keep tabs on players. A great visual conceit, aping the view most familiar to sports fans, it was frankly surprising that no one had thought of it before. "I got *Hardball* driving home one day, as simple as that," Bob explains. "If you are not visual by nature you can't survive in the game business. That has always been the 'hook.'"

> **"If you are not visual by nature you can't survive in the game business"** BOB ON WHAT YOU NEED TO SUCCEED

Continuing the film and television theme, *Psi 5 Trading Company* took its inspiration from *Star Trek*, putting gamers in the captain's seat of a 31st Century star freighter. Designed by Mike Lorenzen, another recruit from Activision, *Psi 5* was uniquely character-driven, focusing on efficient delegation of commands through an intricate joystick-controlled menu system. Accolade even pulled off the promotional coup of having its game featured in *Eagle*'s 'Computer Warrior' comic-strip series in the UK.

Each of these games featured beautiful, full-colour high-resolution graphics created by ex-Atari graphic artist Mimi Doggett. Sound and music were provided by Ed Bogas, composer of a number of television and film soundtracks including the Charlie Brown TV cartoons and *Fritz The Cat*. Mimi's talents were later seen in Mike's second game, *Card Sharks*, which featured animated games of blackjack and poker against comical representations of current world leaders – 'Ronnie', 'Gorb' and 'Maggie'.

"When I joined, it was only Bob, Al, Mike and Laverne Laws at Accolade," remembers Mimi. "I supported the efforts of Bob, Al and Mike in a tiny back room of a very small three-room office. I was their 'artist' and I got to help them develop their first line of products. That was a real honour, and a realisation of my passion for computers and pixels."

"Those early days for artists were rather difficult with the limited graphic tools and limited graphics which put a dampener on their creative juices," says Bob. "I was usually a graphic tweaker, too, adapting it to my code or background or fixing the animation. I'm not sure all my graphic artists appreciated it…" ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

5 Number of employees at Accolade in 1984

6 Number of unofficial Mega Drive releases by Accolade before the Sega lawsuit.

7 Number of playable crew positions in *The Dambusters*.

9 Number of lives Bubsy The Bobcat has. Literally.

10 Number of seconds required to draw a course scene in *Mean 18* on an IBM XT computer.

16 Number of years Accolade existed.

59 Launch price, in US dollars, of the Genesis version of *Hardball*.

148 Maximum allowable error margin during launch in *Apollo*.

360 Top speed (mph) of the De Havilland Mosquito fighter-bomber in *Ace Of Aces*.

800 Number of locations in *Elvira: Mistress Of The Dark*.

1,500 Number of words recognised by adventure *Les Manley: Search for the King*.

9851700 Accolade's old phone number. We haven't tried it.

BIG SCREEN ACCOLADE

Bob Whitehead's *Hardball* is famously immortalised in the opening of Rob Reiner's classic film adaptation of *The Princess Bride*. The game can be seen played by Fred Savage's character as he convalesces in bed during an illness, prior to the arrival of grandfather Peter Falk and the so-called 'kissing book'. "My greatest kick was showing my grandson that scene, while he was watching the movie," reveals a smiling Bob. "'Really grandpa, that's yours?!'"





Imagine *Sonic The Hedgehog* but with no charm or gameplay. That's *Bubsy*.

"It felt more like experimental development," agrees Mimi, "pushing boundaries where games had been, trying to give the gamer a more rich and different visual experience. *Hardball* was a challenge with the Commodore system and its colour display – doing large animations in that environment. I studied major league pitches and batters in action, and found a VCR that had stop frame to study their motion. *Psi 5 Trading Company* was just pure fun. All those characters, attitudes and personalities – we all put a lot of our imaginations into those! That first 'push' to get the first product line out was intense to say the least… it was a 24/7 effort."

Frisina struck a deal for the European distribution of these early Accolade titles through Geoff Brown's US Gold, which produced workable, if slightly awkward multi-load tape conversions alongside the original disk releases. Accolade self-published its games in North America, using simple but distinctive 'gatefold' style cardboard packaging. Later, European distribution would be handled by Electronic Arts, who also became Accolade's biggest competitor in its domestic market.

> **"Our demographics were teenage boys, ages 12 to 45"**
>
> BOB JOKES ABOUT WHO ACCOLADE'S GAMES WERE AIMED AT



Moonwalks and Mosquitoes

As its internal development potential was initially limited, licensing and distributing third-party software was always an intended strategy of Accolade's. One of the first was *Sundog: Frozen Legacy*, a cult space-trading game for the Apple II (and later for the Atari ST), the debut game of *Dungeon Master* creator FTL. Canadian studio Artech (formerly part of Sydney Developments), offered *Fight Night*, a comic boxing simulation featuring humorous characters such as 'Dip Stick' and 'British Bulldog'.

Founded by programmers Rick Banks and Paul Butler, the Ottawa-based developer had achieved recognition with games *BC's Quest For Tires* and Desert Fox. In partnership with Accolade, Rick Banks and Paul Butler would go from strength to strength with a number of lovingly researched, historically based software titles. Artech's action-oriented simulations, such as *Dambusters*, *Ace Of Aces*, *Apollo 18* and *The Train* hit the teen-to-adult market profile squarely on the head. "Our demographics were teenage boys, ages 12 to 45," Bob quips.

"The hook behind *Fight Night* was that there hadn't been a boxing game yet," remembers Paul. "*Dambusters* was based on the movie, of course, and it was the very first multi-station simulation game, where the player took the role of more than one character – pilot, navigator, gunner, bomber and tail gunner."

"*Ace Of Aces* had 'Dolly Parton' clouds that were generated in rows starting with grey in the distance and then light grey and white, as

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



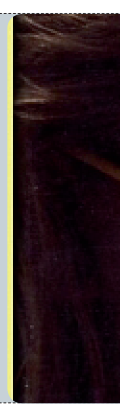
Alan Miller
Post-Accolade career

After leaving Accolade, Alan co-founded Trilium, a start-up company in the use of speech recognition in consumer electronics, and Click Health, a company publishing health education software for kids with asthma and diabetes. In 2001 he joined ex-Activision colleagues David Crane and Gary Kitchen at the online-gaming content provider Skyworks, as VP of business development. Here he negotiated a number of high-profile distribution deals with game portals owned by MSN and Shockwave. He now runs his own consultancy offering guidance in interactive entertainment, educational software and online publishing.



Bob Whitehead
Post-Accolade career

Bob took a temporary hiatus from Accolade after finishing *4th & Inches* in 1987, working on child welfare projects with low income, inner-city families. He returned to Accolade to head up product development, only to retire in 1992 to lend his expertise to non-profit religious start-ups. "Passion is what separated me from the pack," he says, "and it's my spiritual passion that sent me in a new direction." Lately he's been toying with projects in "the mobile, cell phone, and online businesses." He lives in Silicon Valley, with his wife, Karron – his latest and happiest achievement being regularly bonding with his "two terrific grandkids."

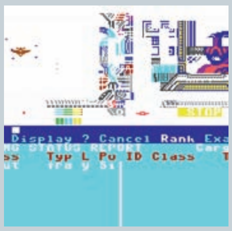


SIX OF THE BEST

Hardball
Accolade's defining sport simulation, *Hardball* set new standards in visual presentation for the genre. Its pioneering 'TV camera' viewpoint and superbly implemented arcade-style control-system allowed players to swing and pitch to a number of different locations on the field for the first time, making the thrill of chasing that elusive home run absolutely irresistible.



Psi 5 Trading Company
Mixing *Star Trek*-style sci-fi with a smattering of Atari's celebrated *Star Raiders*, this is a wonderfully inventive space combat sim. Pick a crew of lovingly animated characters and tackle nasty space pirates, while freighting a hold of precious galactic goodies across the frontier. We're rather fond of the weapons guy who looks suspiciously like an Ewok.



Ace Of Aces
Shades of *633 Squadron* as you take to the skies in your RAF Mosquito and take on the Luftwaffe's finest. *Aces* took the 'multi-position' concept of *Dambusters*, with a playable pilot's-eye view (complete with fluffy parallax clouds) and control of the business end of the bomb-bay for lining your sights on enemy targets – trains, V2 launch-sites and submarine pens.



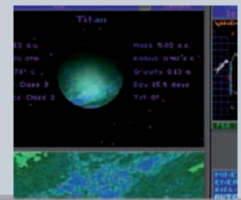
Apollo 18
Named after a cancelled NASA mission, *Apollo 18*'s epic scope and attention to detail was remarkable. Starting with a thrilling Saturn V blast-off sequence, and taking in orbital dockings, space walks, and the moon landing itself, it showed that Accolade certainly had the right stuff when it came to creating unique, historically based simulations.



The Train: Escape To Normandy
Based on the classic WWII Burt Lancaster flick, this gripping adventure blends train driving with killing Nazis as you steam across occupied France with a cargo of priceless war treasures in tow. Ally with the Resistance, take stations and bridges, fend off German fighters, and keep that boiler stoked. C'mon, you can even blow the whistle…



Star Control II
Accolade's sci-fi masterpiece still has a loyal fan following 15 years on, and it's not difficult to see why. A huge, story-driven adventure featuring an enormous open-ended 'universe' of star systems, bizarre alien races and customisable space-faring hardware, it's a superbly designed and highly atmospheric title, particularly in its 'deluxe' incarnation on 3DO.





there were only 16 colours in the C64 palette. *The Train* used scaleable sprites drawn from back to front so that they grew out of the distance as the train raced down the track, quite an innovation for the time. Another trick was to put a white pixel beside a red pixel which would bleed into pink, a 17th colour for the Commodore 64!"

"Budgets in those days were $60,000 to $80,000 per game and development took about eight months. However, the games could sell between half a million and a million units. *Ace Of Aces* sold 500,000 units on multiple platforms, although we had no office and all meetings were in bars and restaurants. It was exciting to be at the very start of the industry, when everything was new and hadn't been done before. That was the driving force behind each new project – come up with something new, bold and different."

Golf Wars

The ongoing approach of packing increasing realism into its products extended to Accolade's impressive roster of sporting titles. Bob followed his successful *Hardball* with the American football-themed *4th & Inches*, ex-Activision designer Steve Cartwright created the basketball sim *Fast Break*, and Artech explored tennis with *Serve & Volley*. However, it was golf that would, along with baseball, become the company's most successful sporting avenue.

Mean 18, Accolade's first golf title, was programmed by Rex Bradford, veteran of Parker Brothers and designer of *The Empire Strikes Back* on the 2600. His simulation has one significant claim to fame. It includes the first instance of the now-familiar three-click power bar denoting power (backswing), downswing and 'hook'. "I did invent the 'three-click system' and probably should have patented it I suppose," Rex reminisces. "I wanted something that was easy to do but afforded a little bit of skill."

1986 turned out to be the year of the episode Bob terms 'Golf Wars', as *Mean 18* teed off against EA's *World Tour Golf* and Access Software's *Leaderboard*. Bradford's game became the foundation for Accolade's famous *Jack Nicklaus Golf* series, with its accurate depictions of real-life venues (St Andrews and Pebble Beach), and a unique course-design tool. "Clearly, the Jack licence was a terrific move," says Bob. "It's kind of the way sports titles go. We were fortunate to have course design as part of our product, Jack's course architecture business has always been very important to him, it was our closer."

Accolade would attempt to sustain its competitive edge with rivals EA and Epyx into the Nineties, with the Olympic-themed *The Games* series and further licensed properties like the *Pele* soccer franchise and *Mike Ditka Ultimate Football*. "The sports titles lent themselves to this 'one-upmanship' environment," admits Bob. "You just had to feel you were leading the way with each and every product release."

Distinctive and Toys For Bob

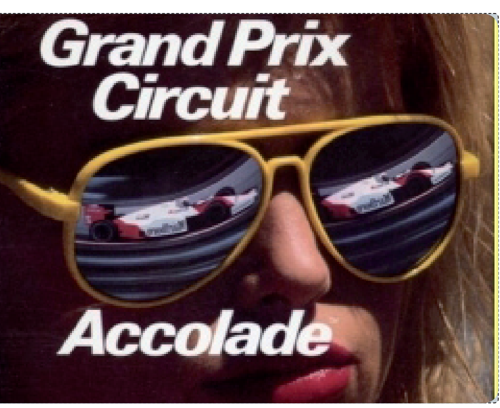
A second Canadian studio, Distinctive Software, would be responsible for creating one of Accolade's most famous franchises. Founder Don Mattrick was initially approached to help with conversions of its existing releases. "Accolade wanted to limit its risk by making us do ports before allowing us to make any original products," remembers Amory Wong, a former programmer for Distinctive. "I ported *Fight Night* and *Ace Of Aces* to the Atari 400/800. These were done in less than six months each. Those were pretty lean times because I got less than $8,000 per port. I had to moonlight working at computer stores. But I did it because I was having fun."

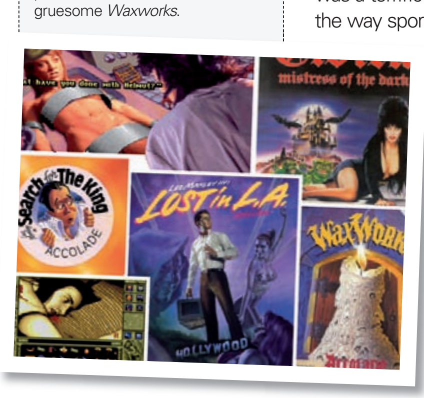
Distinctive's first original product, *Accolade's Comics*, was an unusual idea – an interactive comic strip following the adventures of Steve Keene, a bungling secret

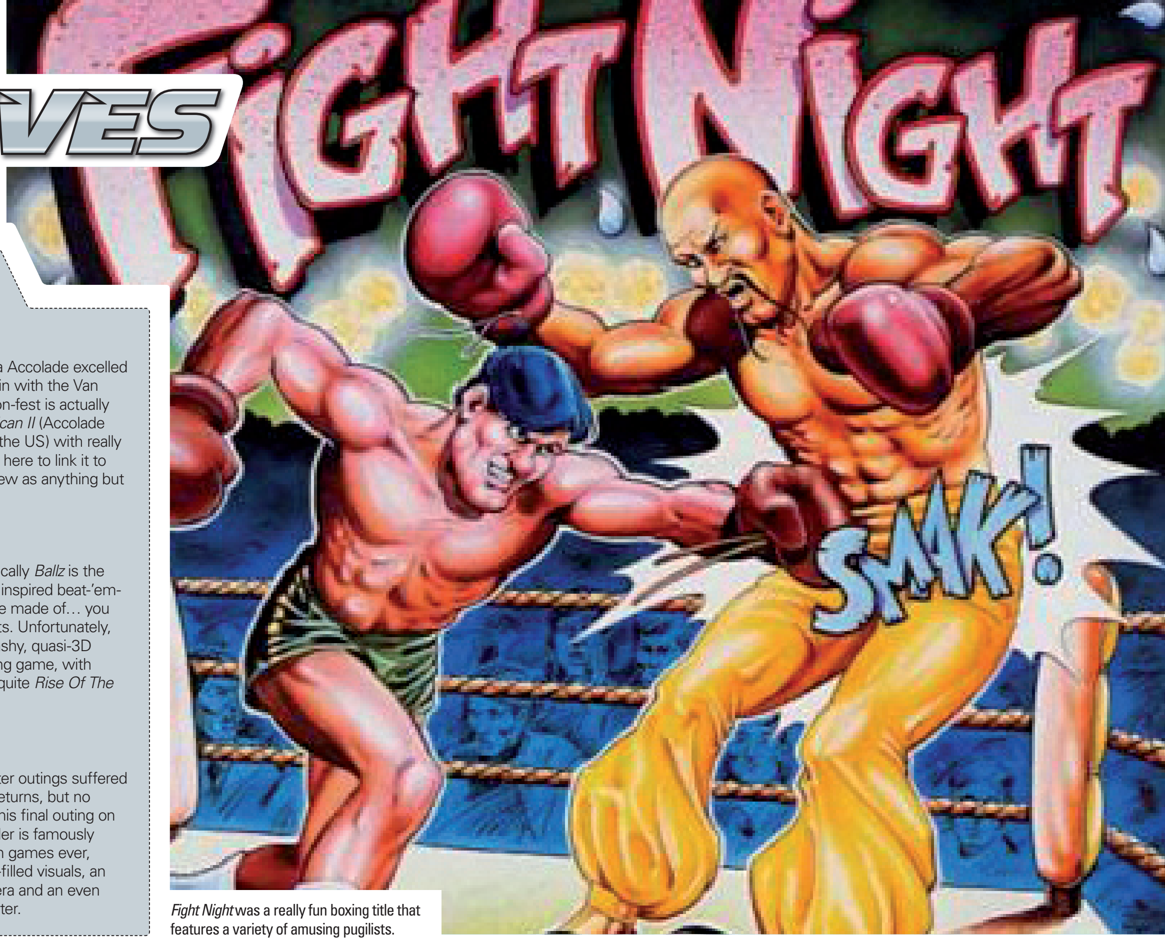
ACCOLADE'S ADVENTURES

The success in the genre of rival Sierra during the late-Eighties, supplied the inspiration for Accolade's brief dalliance with the adventure game market. *King's Quest* and traditional fantasy themes inspired *Altered Destiny*, while *Leisure Suit Larry* was the impetus for a couple of ribald titles starring geeky antihero Les Manley. "While Sierra products were developed using a proprietary 'scripting' system, Accolade's products were created with a tool I designed that allowed drag-and-drop animation on a timeline," says programmer Steve Cartwright. "We called it a 'Scene Editor'. It was amazingly similar to what Macromedia later developed as Flash. The products combined the editor with a complete language parser developed by Mike Berlyn who had earlier worked for Infocom creating text adventures." Steve devised two *Les Manley* games for Accolade, *Search For The King* and *Lost In LA* – the first adventure game product to feature digitised live actors, filmed in front of a bluescreen and superimposed over painted backdrops.

The company also had moderate success with the *Elvira* adventure game franchise, another adult-oriented adventure series from British developer Horrorsoft. This was a guise of Simon and Mike Woodroffe, the creators of *Simon The Sorcerer*. Their final production for Accolade was the gruesome *Waxworks*.







Fight Night was a really fun boxing title that features a variety of amusing pugilists.

THREE TO AVOID



Universal Soldier

Movie licences aren't an area Accolade excelled in, and here's why… this tie-in with the Van Damme-ster's futuristic action-fest is actually a bastardised version of *Turrican II* (Accolade had published the original in the US) with really rubbish bosses. There's little here to link it to the movie, and it's hard to view as anything but a blatant cash-in.



Ballz

No sniggering please. Technically *Ballz* is the dog's spuds, a *Virtua Fighter* inspired beat-'em-up where the combatants are made of… you guessed it… spherical objects. Unfortunately, it's not much more than a flashy, quasi-3D demo dressed up as a fighting game, with little depth or longevity. Not quite *Rise Of The Robots*, but it's a close call.



Bubsy 3D

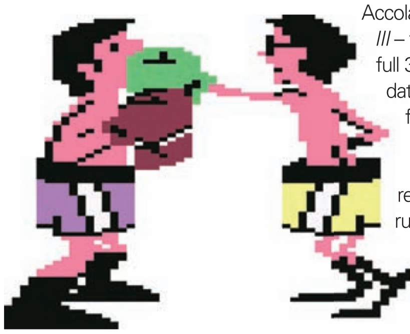
Accolade mascot Bubsy's later outings suffered with the law of diminishing returns, but no one was quite prepared for this final outing on the PSone. This franchise-killer is famously one of the worst 3D platform games ever, with horribly choppy pop-up-filled visuals, an uncontrollable in-game camera and an even less controllable main character.

agent. "This was quite a risky project at the time because the style of the game was quite a departure from existing games," Amory admits. Published on three floppy disks, the ambitious and beautifully presented title received mixed reviews, with the negatives focusing primarily on the limited interactivity (despite the inclusion of several arcade-style sequences) and the high price ($39.95) of the package.

"After *Comics*, Don felt that for our next project we had to go more 'high concept'," Amory recalls. "He had always been interested in sports cars – I can't remember if he still had his Toyota Supra at the time or whether he had already moved on to his Porsche 944. Distinctive got enough advances at the time to get a 'real' office. I got the PC version of *Test Drive* done in three months, and it was released before the C64, Amiga and ST versions, with the Apple II version following later."

Test Drive originated the formula of racing exotic supercars across the great wide open, while evading police patrols, a concept later 'borrowed' by Electronic Arts for its *Need For Speed* series. The games would become Accolade's best-known franchise, with Distinctive handling the sequel *Test Drive II: The Duel* and two other titles using the game engine – *Grand Prix Circuit* and *The Cycles*. Accolade itself developed *Test Drive III* – the first instalment to feature full 3D polygon graphics. Numerous data and scenery disks added further profitability for both companies. Many spin-offs and sequels later, the franchise remains the world's longest-running racing game series.

> **"You just had to feel you were leading the way with each and every product release"** BOB ON ATTEMPTING TO INNOVATE



For many, an epic space adventure by Archon designer Paul Reiche III and Fred Ford came to represent Accolade at its peak. Forming their own small development studio, Toys For Bob, in 1989, the pair drew inspiration from the free-roaming strategy of *Star Raiders* and the one-on-one starship combat of *Spacewar* to produce *Star Control*. As Reiche states, the game combined "thoughtful aspects of gameplay with twitchy ones, scratching the same itch as *Archon*."

Reiche and Ford's creation, with its unique pseudo-3D star-map, charismatic alien races, and enjoyably old-school interstellar skirmishes, led to the expanded universe of *Star Control II*. An enduring fan favourite, the game took a sci-fi role-playing approach, with a massively rich game environment including dozens of hand-painted cut-scenes, animations and characters, and a sophisticated multiple-choice conversation system. (For more background on the *Star Control* series see **RG** issues 14 and 15.)

The Genesis Years

By the early-Nineties, the new-found popularity of Sega and Nintendo's consoles forced Accolade back into a market it had

TIMELINE

1984 ACCOLADE FORMED BY ACTIVISION FOUNDER-EMPLOYEES BOB WHITEHEAD AND ALAN MILLER. THE COMPANY MOVE INTO OFFICES IN SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA. TIM FRISINA RECRUITED AS COMPANY CEO.

1985 HARDBALL AND LAW OF THE WEST, DESIGNED BY WHITEHEAD AND MILLER RESPECTIVELY, ARE RELEASED. ALAN MILLER BECOMES VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT. TWO THIRD-PARTY TITLES, SUNDOG: FROZEN LEGACY (APPLE II) AND FIGHT NIGHT (C64) ARE PUBLISHED. US GOLD PUBLISHES ACCOLADE'S GAMES IN THE UK.

1986 MIKE LORENZEN'S PSI 5 TRADING COMPANY, ARTECH'S DAMBUSTERS AND ACE OF ACES, AND REX BRADFORD'S MEAN 18 RELEASED.

1987 DISTINCTIVE SOFTWARE'S TEST DRIVE RELEASED. ELECTRONIC ARTS BECOMES EUROPEAN DISTRIBUTOR FOR ACCOLADE'S GAMES.

1988 APOLLO 18: MISSION TO THE MOON AND THE TRAIN: ESCAPE TO NORMANDY RELEASED. ALAN EPSTEIN BECOMES CEO.

1990 PAUL REICHE'S STAR CONTROL IS RELEASED.

1991 SEGA SERVES ACCOLADE A LAWSUIT FOR PUBLISHING UNLICENSED SOFTWARE AND REVERSE ENGINEERING THE GENESIS. SEGA PREVAILS, BUT ACCOLADE LATER WINS ON APPEAL. ALAN MILLER APPOINTED CEO OF THE COMPANY.

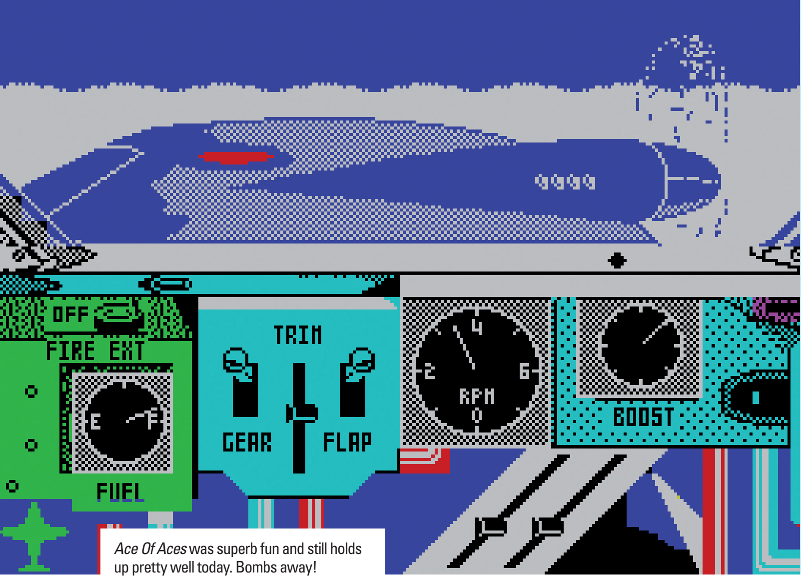
1992 STAR CONTROL II IS RELEASED. BOB WHITEHEAD LEAVES THE COMPANY.

1993 BUBSY IN: CLAWS ENCOUNTERS OF THE FURRED KIND RELEASED.

1994 ALAN MILLER DEPARTS ACCOLADE. PETER HARRIS STEPS INTO THE CEO POSITION.

1995 PETER HARRIS LEAVES AND ACCOLADE APPOINTS JAMES BARNETT AS PRESIDENT.

1999 ACCOLADE IS ACQUIRED BY INFOGRAMES FOR AN ESTIMATED $48.5 MILLION.

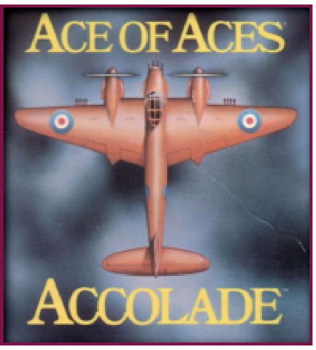


Ace Of Aces was superb fun and still holds up pretty well today. Bombs away!





The Duel turned out to be an excellent sequel that greatly improved on *Test Drive*.







Home Alone: Interesting ideas (you set some fun traps) but pretty poor gameplay.

initially tried to abandon. Demonstrating a similar fight-the-system mantra to Activision, the company's response to Sega's licensing monopoly on Genesis (Mega Drive) games was to reverse engineer the system and sidestep the boot-up protection that allowed software to run on it. Following the publication of a number of unlicensed Genesis titles, Sega sued for trademark infringement (see the 'Sega Vs Accolade' boxout). A messy lawsuit followed, with Accolade winning on appeal, and Sega eventually granted a development licence. The condition was that Accolade produce a set quota of Sega titles, and a significantly higher ratio of products than for Nintendo's console. This was to cause an unfortunate dilution of quality in Accolade's Genesis catalogue as it scurried to fulfil its mandate.

Despite co-founding the company, and creating one of its biggest franchises, Bob Whitehead left Accolade soon after. "I've never been a sequel guy, I just don't like looking back much," he admits, voicing a lack of regret about his non-involvement in later instalments of the *Hardball* series. "I do the same with almost everything. You can argue I left Accolade in 1992, at the height of my career and compensation, to pursue my heart. I wouldn't trade a moment of my hiatus, despite the hit on my respect and pocket book."

Ironically, Accolade's biggest hit would be a Genesis title which aped its former persecutor's famous blue mascot. "I kind of got tired of adventure this and adventure that," said creator and former Infocom designer Mike Berlyn, speaking in 2005. "I saw this game called *Sonic The Hedgehog* and said to myself, 'Oh, I can really get into this, I can really see something.' So I played *Sonic* for nearly 14 hours a day for a week. And out of that came *Bubsy*." Accolade's archetypal platforming bobcat would appear on nearly every console of his day, including the SNES, Jaguar and finally, PlayStation.

End of an Era

Alan Miller departed in 1994 to start Click Health, pioneering the field of interactive health education software. Peter Harris, former CEO of toy chain FAO Schwarz, was drafted in to fill Alan's shoes, but remained for less than a year, and was superseded by Jim Barnett. Under Barnett the company floundered with a succession of releases that failed to capture the public imagination in the same way its earlier output had done. Updates of old franchises like *Test Drive 4* proved commercial disappointments, and rushed, near-unplayable misfires like *Bubsy 3D* damaged the company's reputation badly.

Hopes were pinned on expensive PC projects such as the space-strategy titles *Deadlock* and *Star Control 3*. "*Deadlock* was a comeback for Accolade," explains producer Matthew Ford, "making the top-ten list, but it wasn't enough to counterbalance other big-budget games which lost money. Big hopes for *Star Control 3* were dashed. After that, due to the major success of *Test Drive Off-Road*, Accolade decided to focus its attention entirely on console titles. Ironically, the company killed development of an MMO in an era when it would have been at the forefront of a major gaming trend that would revive the PC business."

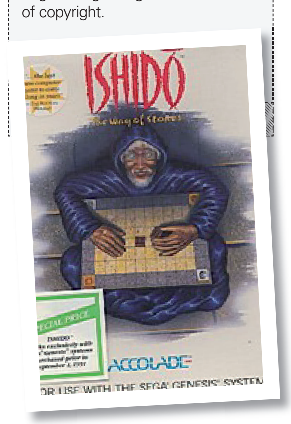
Finally, in 1999, Infogrames absorbed the company's assets in a $48.5 million handover. Bob prefers to remember the company's golden years, before Sega and Sony arrived on the gaming scene, when hard work and a passion for breaking new ground in home computer games software was a real driving force.

"Accolade's success was like that second Olympic gold," he muses. "Not only was it an indication of not just being lucky, but you can't take success like that away. I like to think I know something about entertainment, software development, technical challenges, and working hard. My one regret is that I still get 'the vibe' from many folks who don't like other folks that have seen my kind of success. Hey… if they only knew me."

SEGA VS ACCOLADE

In 1990, Accolade published a Sega Genesis version of *Ishido*, after disassembling several Sega cartridges to discover system compatibility requirements. In 1991, Sega released the Genesis III console which incorporated the trademark security system (TMSS) which displayed a notification when an official cartridge was inserted that it was a licensed Sega product. Accolade's second-tier Genesis releases, which included *Hardball*, *Star Control* and *Turrican*, included a portion of the TMSS header (four bytes of data consisting of the letters S-E-G-A) required to run the games on the Genesis III. This four-byte code had been discovered in a second round of reverse engineering by programmer Mike Lorenzen. Unfortunately, the 'official' Sega licence notification was still displayed when Accolade's unlicensed games were started. Sega sued for copyright and trademark infringement. The case initially settled in favour of Sega, but Accolade overturned the ruling on appeal, in what is now seen as a landmark case for reverse engineering as legitimate 'fair use' of copyright.





THE GAMES OF ACCOLADE

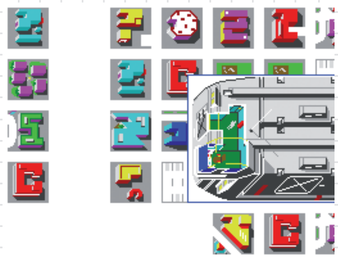
Accolade lasted 15 years before finally being bought out by Infogrames. How many of the following classic (and not so classic) titles do you remember playing?



SUNDOG: FROZEN LEGACY

» Year: 1984
» Buy it for: £8+

FTL's Apple II space-trading sim offers a mix of space battles, trading, and exploring alien cities on foot or by vehicle. Rightly regarded as a cult classic, its improved incarnation on the Atari ST is well worth seeking out.





FIGHT NIGHT

» Year: 1985
» Buy it for: £1+

Artech's humorous boxing game offers a comic-book style similar to its *Quest For Tires* and *Grog's Revenge*. With a roster of 12 fighters to take on in single-player or multiplayer mode it's an entertaining if slightly shallow take on the genre.

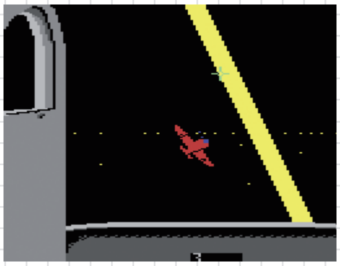




THE DAMBUSTERS

» Year: 1984
» Buy it for: £2+

This forerunner to the successful *Ace Of Aces* gave gamers the chance to re-create the famous film, piloting an RAF Lancaster on its way to offload a bouncing bomb. Players also need to master gunnery and navigation to achieve their goal.

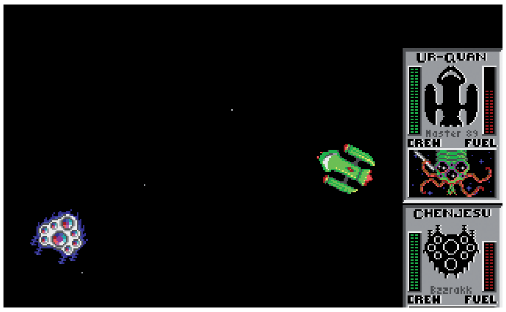


MUST PLAY









STAR CONTROL

» Year: 1990
» Buy it for: £7+

From the first glimpse of its unique star-map and classic Newtonian space-combat, it was clear that *Star Control* would be a worthy follow-up to *Archon*. Stick with the 16-bit versions for the true experience, as the 8-bits really disappoint.



4TH & INCHES

» Year: 1986
» Buy it for: £1+

Bob Whitehead's second sports simulation for Accolade isn't quite as impressive as *Hardball*, but is still a rather decent stab at replicating the statistics-heavy world of American football, fusing arcade-style action with plenty of strategic depth.

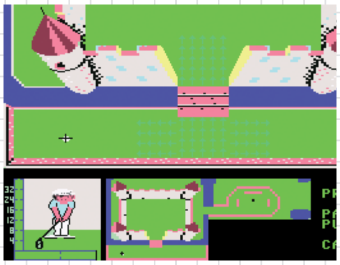




MINI-PUTT

» Year: 1987
» Buy it for: £3+

For a refreshingly different spin on the golfing genre, without needing to wear any plaid trousers, why not try a round of the hugely entertaining *Mini-Putt*. If crazy golf in real life was as much fun as *Mini-Putt* we would be off down the place in our local park every lunchtime…

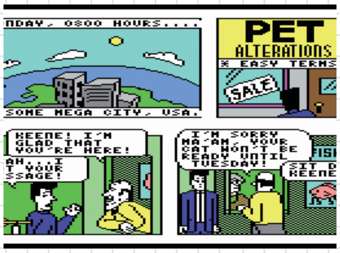




ACCOLADE'S COMICS

» Year: 1987
» Buy it for: £10+

Advertised as the world's first 'living comic book', *Comics* was certainly an intriguing concept. Unfortunately, it amounts to little more than a plot-driven multiple-choice questionnaire, with some admittedly clever graphic trickery.





TEST DRIVE

» Year: 1987
» Buy it for: £7+

The first in the series of Accolade's 'real driving simulator' offers the chance to buckle up in five of the hottest sports cars of the Eighties. Its famous mountainside course adds the twin dangers of precipitous drops and police speed traps.





POWER AT SEA

» Year: 1987
» Buy it for: £8+

Set in the Pacific Theatre of 1944, *Power At Sea* cast you as the commander of a small strike force wrestling for the control of an island archipelago. Strategic depth is a little light, but the *Beach Head*-style action sequences are fairly enjoyable.





ISHIDO: THE WAY OF STONES

» Year: 1990
» Buy it for: £5+

A fictional 'puzzle game of ancient origins', *Ishido* is a fascinating title where you match 'stones' by colour or shape on a 96-square board, with the aim being to place your entire quota of 72 stones without running out of allowable moves.





KILLED UNTIL DEAD

» Year: 1986
» Buy it for: £8+

The name says it all really – this is an affectionate send-up of a Poirot-style murder mystery game mixed with a slice of the board game Cluedo. It's down to the detective Hercule Holmes to solve a murder.

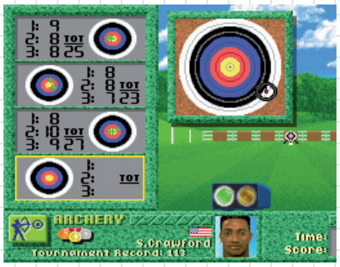




THE GAMES: SUMMER CHALLENGE

» Year: 1993
» Buy it for: £8+

» There's plenty of Olympic-themed button bashing in this homage to the Epyx *Games* series of old. *Summer Challenge* features eight events – high jump, hurdles, javelin, pole vault, kayaking, archery, equestrian and cycling.





THE GAMES: WINTER CHALLENGE

» Year: 1991
» Buy it for: £10+

There are eight events in this winter version of *The Games* – two-man bobsled, luge, biathlon, ski jump, giant slalom, cross country and speed skating. Possibly even more fun than the summer edition.

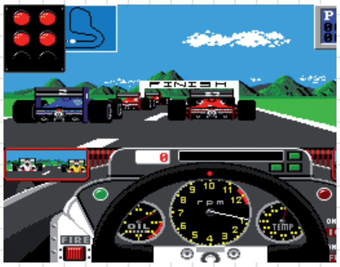


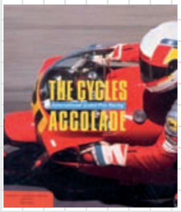


GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT

» Year: 1988
» Buy it for: £6+

A detailed Formula 1 racing simulation with cars from constructors Williams, McLaren and Ferrari, and real-life circuits. However, the use of the *Test Drive* engine meant it seemed a little slower paced than some competing F1 racing games.





THE CYCLES

» Year: 1990
» Buy it for: £6+

This semi-sequel to *Grand Prix Circuit* takes to the road in two-wheel form, with large bike sprites and a novel behind-the-handle-bars perspective (later seen in *Moto Racer*). The addition of gradients to the tracks is also a welcome improvement.





BUBBLE GHOST

» Year: 1987
» Buy it for: £11+

You control a ghost with a bubble. Your spook must blow it into a goal on the opposite side of the screen, avoiding cunningly placed spikes, fans, and other obstacles. A fun idea that works best in the mouse-controlled Amiga and ST versions.





BUBSY IN: CLAWS ENCOUNTERS OF THE FURRED KIND

» Year: 1993
» Buy it for: £1+

Accolade's bobcat mascot makes his debut in this successful tribute to Sega's *Sonic*. Sadly, *Bubsy*'s slippery controls and cheap deaths mean only the patient need apply.





TEST DRIVE III: THE PASSION

» Year: 1990
» Buy it for: £7+

Another bout of automotive exotica for computer petrol heads. The first *Test Drive* game to feature full 3D polygon graphics, this was also the first to feature digitised dashboards from real-life supercars, instant replays, and… cows…





WAXWORKS

» Year: 1992
» Buy it for: £10+

This 'unofficial' third instalment of the *Elvira* series was by far the most ambitious of the Horrorsoft games. A massive role-playing dungeon crawl, *Waxworks* boasts a blood-curdling atmosphere and some truly gruesome graphics.



MUST AVOID





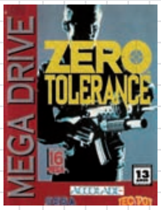




WARPSPEED

» Year: 1992
» Buy it for: £8+

A lacklustre *Wing Commander* clone that never takes off due to its dreary graphics, dull weaponry and choppy controls. *WarpSpeed*'s planetless universe is very empty, which makes us wonder where its aliens come from.



ZERO TOLERANCE

» Year: 1994
» Buy it for: £10+

One of the few first-person shooters ever developed for the Mega Drive, *Zero Tolerance* is a quality blaster set in a massive, 40 level space station. Unusually, the game features six characters to play in the game, each with differing abilities.



RETRO SHAMER

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CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE AVENGERS

CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE AVENGERS WAS A POPULAR SIDE-SCROLLING FIGHTER IN THE ARCADES. HOWEVER, THEIR QUESTIONABLE SUPERPOWERS WOULD PROVE USELESS ON HOME FORMATS, ESPECIALLY ON ANYTHING BRANDED NINTENDO – EVIDENTLY THE GAME'S VERY OWN GREY KRYPTONITE



» These enemies that resemble insects and fat Samus Arans show up in one whole screen of *Captain America And The Avengers* (this one here).



» Many people will remember this particular boss fight from *Captain America And The Avengers*. Many will try to forget it.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** MINDSCAPE
- » **DEVELOPER:** DATA EAST
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** TOO MUCH
- » **WHY PLAY THIS WHEN YOU CAN PLAY:** STREETS OF RAGE 2





» A great visual analogy of how playing this game for any longer than 40 seconds feels.

POINTLESS PART

With an attack repertoire that can be counted on three fingers, *Captain America And The Avengers* felt the need to let gamers test out its comprehensive move list on a bizarre training mode. It is strange because it's not really a training mode at all, but it is in fact just a shameful one-on-one fighting game starring three moves and four characters, allowing our four heroes to fight each other to find out who's the hardest. If you actually care about them that much you'll probably love this game.



Videogames themed around superheroes tend to be dismal. One of the many tricks that developers employ to suck a gamer in is to, a) make the character they're controlling feel like a pathetic whimpering little oik, and then gradually allow them to build up their powers by running errands and/or punching/shooting things bigger but notably slower/weaker/uglier than them, or b) fuse your protagonist with swanky powers in the first act and then ruthlessly prise them off you like a spoilt brat in the second, therefore giving you a sly glimpse of how awesomely brilliant your character could be if you invest the eight or so hours of gameplay to level them up.

With superhero games this rule, by default, gets eschewed. Generally, you get all your powers at the start of the game and rarely will they change during the course of play. Commonly though, these are the types of games that like nothing more than to lift up their skirts before you've even had a chance to ring their doorbell and ask them to lift up their skirts.

Captain America And The Avengers chronicled the heroic street battle between Captain America, Iron Man, Hawkeye and Vision and the maniacal Red Skull and his army of droids, sentinels and a bizarre assortment of obscure and relatively unknown supervillains.

The Mega Drive port isn't actually that bad. However, the SNES and NES ports are the type of 40 quid investments that have the power to make you feel physically sick.

Most people will be familiar with Iron Man and Captain America. These two characters had their own movies, cartoons and toy lines. The remaining two members of the team, Hawkeye and Vision, are not as well established inside the Marvel universe though. Vision is basically an unfinished looking creation that looks like butterscotch; Hawkeye is the son of Prince Barin from *Flash Gordon*. All the characters have a punch, jump and a long-range blaster attack. Iron Man has a move that looks like he's firing spicy Nik Naks from his hands, Hawkeye fires a primordial bow and arrow, Captain America throws his trademark shield, and Vision has some weird butterscotch-bolt thingy.

The game begins in exactly the same fashion as the arcade game, with a nicely drawn comic strip introduction explaining the origins, leaking the identities and revealing how much health bar each character has. With just three simple controls – punch, attack and jump – the game bizarrely feels the need to let us test them all out in a lame training mode (see the 'Pointless Part' boxout).

While no sane person would ever expect the Super Nintendo to turn out the same graphical finesse as an arcade machine, Mindscape still has no excuses for the ugly visuals and flickering banality that it injected into the game. *Captain America And The Avengers* is sluggish, garish and, at times, often looks like it's being sat on by Fatty Arbuckle's poltergeist. The gameplay also feels like it's been programmed using brown paper and wishes. But despite the game's squidgy look and its fragility, it's the annoying enemy flickering and non-existent collision detection that really proves to be our biggest issue with the game.

Mindscape, in its infinite wisdom, actually felt it would be a great idea to have enemies in the SNES version momentarily flicker with invulnerability every time you hit them, therefore giving them the opportunity to return the favour unless you back off until they stop flashing. As a result, this constant to-and-fro fighting looks catty and feels remarkably crappy. And combat is rendered even more frustrating by the fact that you can't prioritise your attacks because none of the generic enemies in the game display any kind of health bar.

The one ironic saving grace is that the game is very short. And having played through all versions of the game, the SNES version feels noticeably liberal when it comes to its action and length. In fact, the fourth stage is so short it feels like a bonus stage. And don't even get us started on the direness of the NES port – that version is so liberal it's actually missing two of the original characters, Iron Man and Vision (with the game explaining that they've been kidnapped), which, unsurprisingly, happen to be the best characters in the game.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



This SNES version warns you how atrociously bad it is by giving its owner the opportunity to win the actual *Captain America* video arcade game (so what happened to the Avengers then?). Great signals you're giving off there, Mindscape. As far as the box art is concerned it isn't actually that bad to be fair, but it is full of false prophecies. It makes the game look moody, violent, dark and good – all great qualities, but sadly none that actually exist in the game.

A WORD FROM THE MAIN CHARACTER

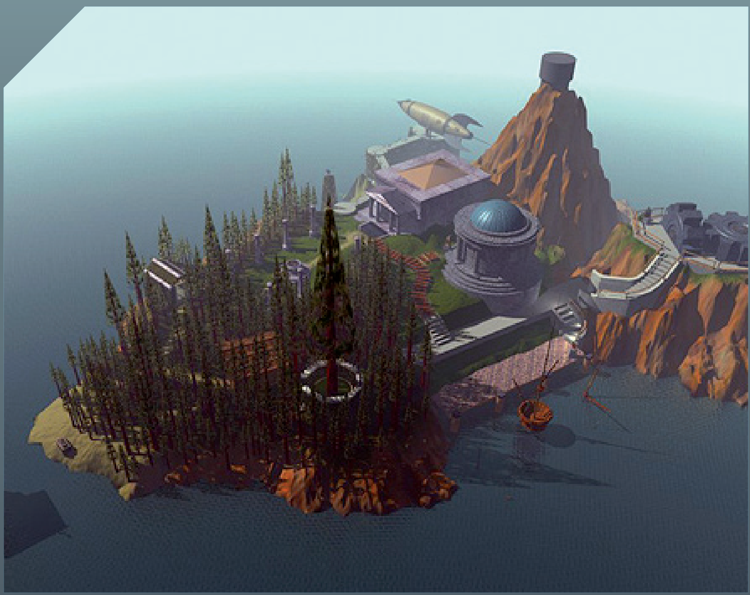
Hey guys, it's the imitable, dashing and very rich industrialist turned superhero Tony Stark here. Stark Enterprises can't be seen to fail so I've been using all my power, celebrity and wealth to keep this game in the charts since 1993, but now I'm running out of desert and warehouses to store my precious cartridges in. Forgive my threatening tone, but if you don't rush out immediately and buy this game I'm going to be forced to buy up the planet and then turn your family into cruise missiles and/or futuristic military robots to try to recoup the costs. I'm guessing you won't like that, so make sure you look out for my eBay shop Tony Stark's Captain America And The Avengers Emporium, and bid generously.



THE MAKING OF...

MYST

It was the game that single-handedly proved to the PC-owning world that shiny CDs could be used for something more exciting than just storing the Encyclopædia Britannica. Join Damien McFerran as he delves into the history of one of biggest selling videogames of all time





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHERS:** BRØDERBUND, SUNSOFT, MIDWAY

» **DEVELOPER:** CYAN WORLDS

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **PLATFORMS:** MAC OS, WINDOWS, SATURN, PLAYSTATION, JAGUAR CD, AMIGA, CD-I, 3DO, PSP, NINTENDO DS

» **GENRE:** PUZZLE ADVENTURE

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

Few videogames have the ability to polarise opinion quite as sharply as *Myst*. When it hit shop shelves back in 1993 many critics scoffed at the sedate gameplay and predicted that few people would want to sit through a game that was little more than an 'interactive picture postcard'. However, the general public clearly didn't share the same viewpoint. *Myst* captured the imagination of millions of gamers and until the publication of *The Sims* in 2002 it was the bestselling PC title of all time – clearly, as a slice of entertainment it did something right, regardless of the harsh critical reception it received from some sectors of the specialist press.

The brainchild of brothers Rand and Robyn Miller, *Myst* is undoubtedly the most famous project to emerge from the siblings' Cyan studio (now known as Cyan Worlds) and famously encouraged hordes of non-gamers to shut down their boring old spreadsheets and use their PCs for something more pleasurable. However, in the beginning the pair didn't intend to produce games for adults. "Rand had an idea for a children's book on a computer," explains Robyn Miller when asked how the duo got into creating videogames. "A child would turn the page, click on items on each page, and those items would react in certain ways." The intuitive interface that would grace *Myst* can trace its origin to this moment. Intrigued by the notion of interactive storytelling, Robyn added his own spin on the concept and proceeded to augment his brother's idea. "Rand sent me a copy of HyperCard, which was like a predecessor to the web," he recalls. "The first drawing I did was of a manhole against a solid white background. But what became immediately obvious was that an entire world existed below that manhole, and I wanted to visit it. So I began to draw it and piece it together. The idea of the book altogether went out the window, or at least it quickly evolved into this idea of a more nonlinear world. It was very exciting; I began moving my way through that world, making it all up as I went along."

This nugget of an idea became Cyan's first game, fittingly entitled *The Manhole*.



» A shot from 2000's *realMyst*, which replicated the entire game using true 3D visuals.



» Some of the game's locations are still dazzling in their detail, even by today's standards.

"WE HAD PROPOSED A MYST-LIKE GAME TO ACTIVISION EARLY ON, BUT THEY REJECTED IT AND TOLD US TO STICK TO CHILDREN'S GAMES… IT WAS SUNSOFT WHO APPROACHED US ASKING US IF WE'D DO A GAME FOR AN OLDER AUDIENCE" ROBYN ON THE CREATION OF MYST

It offered the pair of game-design rookies an opportunity to find their footing in an exciting new industry. "I had very little idea what I was doing in terms of programming," admits Robyn. "But Rand and I made a perfect team. I'd mail floppy disk after floppy disk to Rand, who was living on the opposite side of the country. He made the thing run smoother, faster, and smaller, and then he'd finish it off with sounds and voices." When the pair were satisfied they had a product worth selling, they distributed *The Manhole* via a mail-order system, while actively courting other publishers in order to secure a more financially lucrative deal. "We printed up a few hundred copies and brought them to an industry show," says Robyn. "People seemed to really enjoy walking around a little world, which, at that time, was unique. We met a lot of companies interested in the product, but we ended up going with Activision."

The Manhole was released on CD-ROM in 1989 and enjoys the distinction of being the first computer (but not console) game to be distributed on the format. However, the CD-ROM medium was just used as a convenient way to store the multiple floppy disks that housed *The Manhole*'s code, and it wasn't until Cyan released the sci-fi adventure *Cosmic Osmo And The Worlds Beyond The Mackerel* that the brothers truly exploited the vast potential of the technology. "We didn't have fun with CD-ROM until *Cosmic Osmo*," says Robyn. "That's when we took advantage of all that space; not just with the music, but with the size of the world."

With two successful children's games under their belts the Miller brothers started to consider broadening their horizons a little – a move which surprisingly wasn't met with encouragement from all quarters. "We had proposed a *Myst*-like game to Activision early on, but they rejected it and told us to stick to children's games," says Robyn. "It was our Japanese publisher, Sunsoft, who approached us out of the blue asking us if we'd do a game for an older audience. We shared a tremendous amount of mutual respect toward one another and we were given total creative freedom on the project. That's virtually unheard of. It came at the perfect time; the technology was right and our ideas had matured, and that's when we started *Myst*." Ironically, as part of the deal Sunsoft only wanted the home console distribution rights – an indication of how insignificant the PC gaming market was at the time. It was a decision that would come to haunt the Japanese company.

With vital financial support in place, work on the new title began in earnest. "In the beginning it was just me and Rand," explains Robyn. "We did a lot of intense planning and mapped the whole thing out. It was a blast to be working on something that required a strict logic but also a history and an aesthetic sensibility. This felt more like a real world,



» Such was the success of *Myst* that the Miller brothers even took up modelling Gap khakis.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE MANHOLE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MAC
YEAR: 1988

SPELUNX
SYSTEM: MAC
YEAR: 1992

COSMIC OSMO'S: HEX ISLE
SYSTEMS: MAC, PC
YEAR: 2007



» Each frame was rendered using StrataVision 3D and then edited using Photoshop 1.0.



WHAT'S MY LINE?

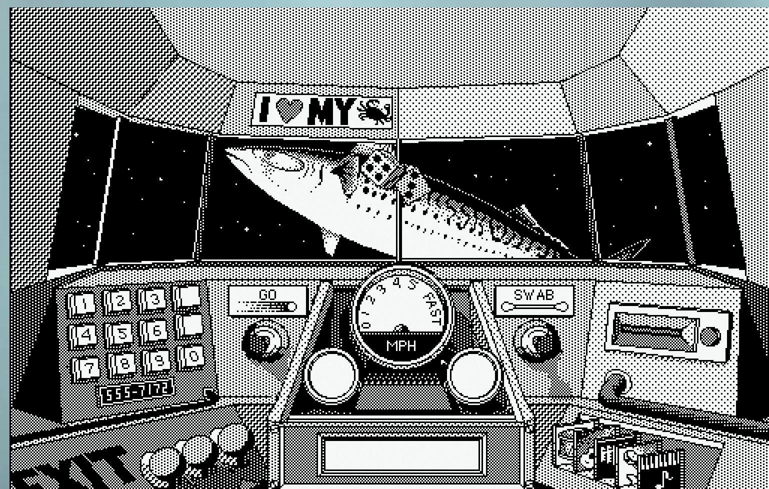


Due to a lack of funds, Rand and Robyn Miller decided to step in front of the camera when it came to casting the key roles of evil brothers Sirrus and Achenar. "We took nothing serious when we started playing around with a cheap video camera; we were laughing most of the time. We did hardly any planning for the parts at all – we didn't even know our lines – even the lighting was horrible. I remember gathering all our footage together for editing and thinking… 'crap, what the hell am I going to do with this?' I had very little useable footage so I created this method of having the brothers mysteriously appear from behind the white noise. In the end, I think it worked well." Rand also assumed the role of the brothers' father Atrus. But what was his muse? "Rand just closed his eyes and pretended he was Al Pacino," laughs Robyn. "Wasn't it obvious?"

THE MAKING OF... MYST



» Cyan Worlds' rather unorthodox HQ in Mead, Washington wouldn't look out of place in one of the company's titles.



» The bizarre *Cosmic Osmo And The Worlds Beyond The Mackerel* was Cyan's second game and made the most of the Apple Mac's monochrome display to create some truly memorable environments.

"THERE WAS NO SINGLE THING WE WERE INSPIRED BY... LOOKING BACK, I'M SURE THAT SOME OF THE INSPIRATIONS CAME FROM MY OWN SCHOOL YEARS AND CHILDHOOD" ROBYN ON WHAT INSPIRED HIM



» Robyn Miller, co-creator of *Myst*

whereas our previous products had felt like expanded playthings. It was far from perfect, but we did our best in those planning stages and had a lot of fun." As productive as this working environment might have been, the pair knew that they would have to enlist the assistance of others to tackle such an ambitious assignment. "After we designed the ideas behind the game the production began, which took about two years," continues Robyn. "About five people were involved in the process. Besides Rand, I worked most closely with Chuck Carter, an extremely talented artist, Chris Brandkamp who did sound design and Richard Watson who helped Rand with HyperCard scripting." The use of HyperCard would ultimately dictate the production of the game. Although *Myst* would go on to enjoy incredible success on the PC, it was actually coded on the Apple Macintosh. "HyperCard only existed on Macs," explains Robyn. "Without HyperCard, I'm certain we would have never made *Myst*."

It's common for game developers to cite other classic videogame titles as inspirations for their work, but for the Miller brothers their influences were more deep-rooted. "There was no single thing we were inspired by," reveals Robyn. "Looking back, I'm sure that some of the inspirations came from my own school years and childhood. For example, during high school, I used to paint these large-scale canvases; I'd spend hours every day on them. They were surreal things, like glimpses into some bizarre universe. I'm sure my childhood fascination with these surrealistic visions influenced the visuals throughout the *Myst* world. There were more direct influences, like some of the 19th Century novels I was reading at the time." Indeed, Jules Verne's 1874 book *The Mysterious Island* is cited as a major inspiration for both the game's setting, and its title.

One of the most distinctive features of *Myst* is the 'Ages' that constitute the various self-contained levels of the game. "We came up with overarching themes," Robyn says when asked about how the team dreamt up these fantastical environments. "An example is the Selenitic Age, where all the puzzles are based on sound or music. I can't say some external thing inspired us; we just racked our brains until we came up with the idea. That's how we worked our way through each of the Ages. There were specific inspirations, but we mostly searched for themes. When designing the puzzles and working our way through a particular age, Rand and I always reminded one another of a credo: 'There's always a

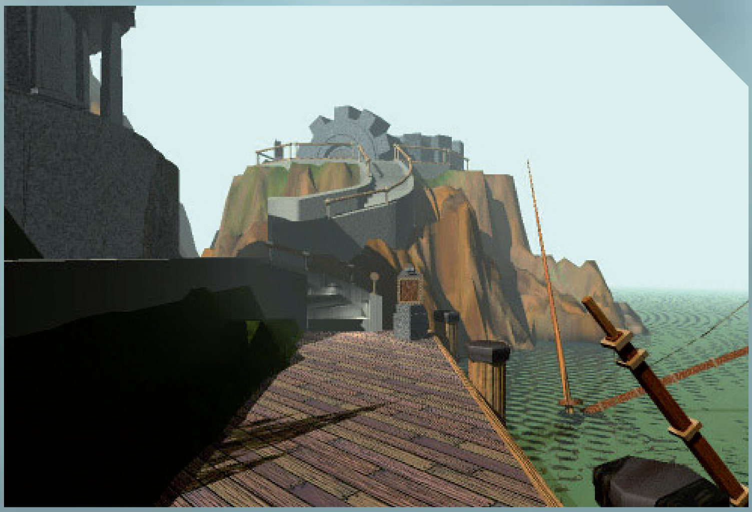
» 1988's *The Manhole* was Cyan's first attempt at creating a fantasy world and has many similarities with *Myst*.



» The 'Ages' in *Myst* were fantasy locations contained within books and allowed the Millers to really let their imaginations run riot.



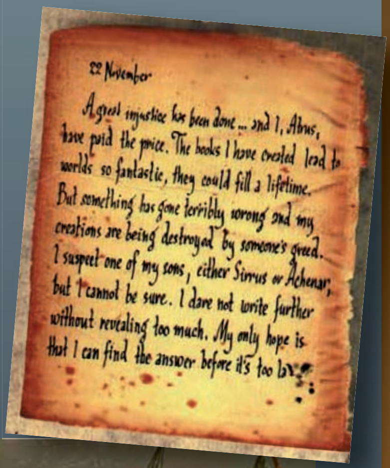

» *Myst V: End Of Ages* saw release in 2005 and discarded the rendered backgrounds and FMV actors for a fully 3D world.


» This scene should be familiar with fans – it's from this wharf that you begin your investigation of the mysterious island.

better idea.' We had to remain flexible and open enough to throw away any idea we'd come up with, knowing that we'd always be able to come up with something better – something more 'right' for the task at hand."

One aspect of the game that is unfairly ignored by critics is the groundbreaking 'transparent' user interface. "We actually worked hard to create a UI that was invisible, something that didn't feel like a computer at all," says Robyn. "At the time Rand and I were reading a number of books dealing with the subject of user interface as it related to the common objects that we often take for granted, like doors, switches, teapots, forks, knives, and everything else that's designed. We were inspired by this notion of UI in the world around us, but mostly by the idea that anyone could conceivably sit down and play a virtual world, with no instructions, no introduction." Indeed, it was this facet of the game that arguably allowed *Myst* to captivate so many 'non-gamers', as Robyn explains: "We imagined a computer illiterate user – and we often thought of our grandmother – or we imagined the type of user that doesn't have the time to learn how to play a game. These were the users that would have to be immediately drawn into a game. We wanted to create an interface that would appeal to this type of user."

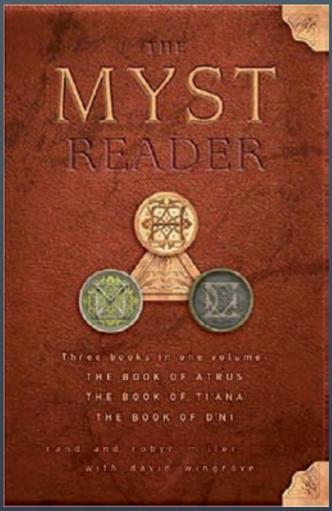
With the visual elements of the game quickly falling into place, the team began work on the aural side of things. Chris Brandkamp handled the distinctive sound effects superbly, but it was Robyn who composed the wonderful music used in the game. Surprisingly, he's highly critical of it. "To this day, I'm still not convinced that *Myst* required music," he says. "Our philosophy was that we were creating a world. We wanted that world to be as real and believable as possible. When we're living our daily lives we don't hear a soundtrack of music. Instead we hear environmental sounds and sometimes these sounds have a real power to provoke mood. Think of water against a shore, birds in the trees or maybe a churn of motors inside a factory; it can be considered music of a sort. I actually think sound effects can be even more powerful in a game because it's a simulation of a nonlinear environment. You're supposed to believe in this place. I never really had the luxury of experimenting with sounds in that way, so we had to rely on music to create our mood. I still wonder if what we did was second best. Ideally speaking, the music should harmoniously coexist with the visuals, the player's actions, the sound effects, the gameplay and the story. These elements should be an inextricable whole, continually bolstering one another, never interrupting one another. That's the job of a director. As a director, I was unhappy with the way the *Myst* music stood out and felt divorced from the player's nonlinear experience. I also have a confession: I'm not a real composer and I sort of faked my way through the entire thing." Fans of the


22 November

A great injustice has been done ... and I, Atrus, have paid the price. The books I have created lead to worlds so fantastic, they could fill a lifetime. But something has gone terribly wrong and my creations are being destroyed by someone's greed. I suspect one of my sons, either Sirrus or Achenar, but I cannot be sure. I dare not write further without revealing too much. My only hope is that I can find the answer before it's too late.

» Since its release in 1993 *Myst* has been converted to numerous formats.





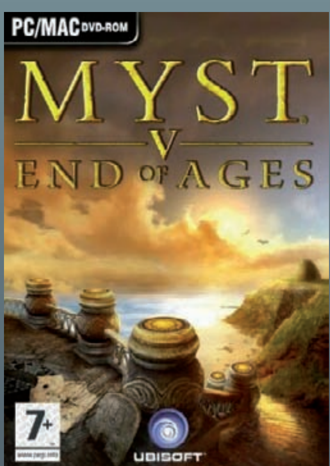


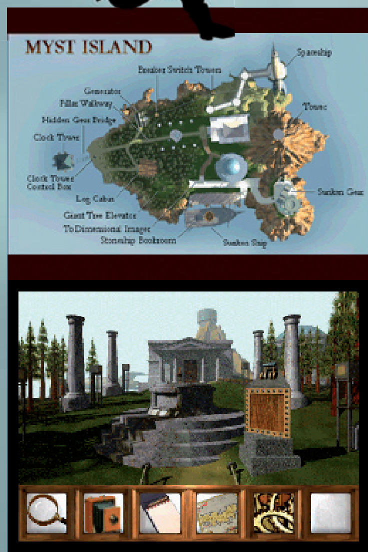
THE MAKING OF... MYST



LICENCE TO PRINT MONEY

The success of *Myst* has resulted in a whole flood of sequels and spin-offs. In addition to 1997's *Riven*, we've seen *Myst III: Exile* (2001), *Myst IV: Revelation* (2004) and *Myst V: End Of Ages* (2005), as well as *Uru*, an online interpretation of the franchise. The original game has been the subject of remakes and reissues as well, with 2000's *realMyst* presenting the entire game world in full 3D. Robyn isn't a fan. "I only saw *realMyst* after it was released. As a remake, it was a lapse of reason and directionless; overt merchandising of the original *Myst*. It definitely wasn't how we originally envisioned *Myst*, as was promoted." A series of books was also commissioned in an attempt to expand the *Myst* universe. "I was involved with agreeing to the three-book deal; it was my biggest mistake while still at Cyan," says Robyn, sadly. "I'm glad many have enjoyed the books, however, I personally was left unsatisfied."





» A screenshot of the disappointing Nintendo DS version, released by Midway in 2007.



» In total *Myst* contains 2,500 different 'frames'. To ensure speedy loading from the relatively slow CD-ROM drives of the time, each frame was reduced to around 80KB in size.

game clearly didn't share Robyn's view and due to public demand an official soundtrack was released on CD in 1998. However, despite the praise-worthy nature of the music, Robyn was adamant that he wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. "With the sequel I made an effort to push the music back into the environment," he says. "In some cases, the soundtrack became something more like tonal sound effects. As a composer, I enjoyed writing the more obvious linear pieces, but I felt *Riven* required those less obvious pieces."

It simply wouldn't be sporting to chat with one half of *Myst*'s creative team without touching upon the subject of the fiendish puzzles that have kept players glued to their monitors all these years. How did the duo approach the design of these brain-teasers? "Carefully – and always thinking of the user," replies Robyn. "How would we approach this puzzle if we were playing the game? How would a new user approach the puzzle? Was it is too difficult, or too easy? We felt our best puzzles in *Myst* were those that weren't arbitrarily tacked on to the story and the environment, like the maze car. Our best puzzles were those that felt cohesively bonded to their surroundings, and didn't really feel like puzzles at all."

The captivating storyline was also a key factor in *Myst*'s appeal. Placing the player in the shoes of a voiceless character known only as 'The Stranger', the game showcases a plot that focuses on two nefarious brothers (played by Rand and Robyn) attempting to undo their father's work. Despite the rather ominous overtones, *Myst* is notable for its complete lack of violence. Over time many people have assumed this to be due to the Miller brothers' strict religious upbringing as sons of a church minister, but Robyn maintains it wasn't as overtly intentional as that. "It's not because Rand and I were on a campaign to stop violence in games," he confirms. "We were just out to make interesting, intriguing games. I think Rand would agree with me that violent imagery in art, film, games, or any other kind of story can be shocking in a way that can be considered good. Jarring, violent imagery is sometimes the only thing that kicks us in the ass and wakes us up to something we'd never otherwise consider. That's what art in general is supposed to do – show us a new way of looking at the world around us. But what doesn't make sense to me is when we turn that shocking sort of violence into fun, like shoot-'em-up titles. They cause us to participate and sometimes even laugh at acts of violence. I can't agree with that. It seems as if we are ripping away some small piece of ourselves. It doesn't make sense to me."

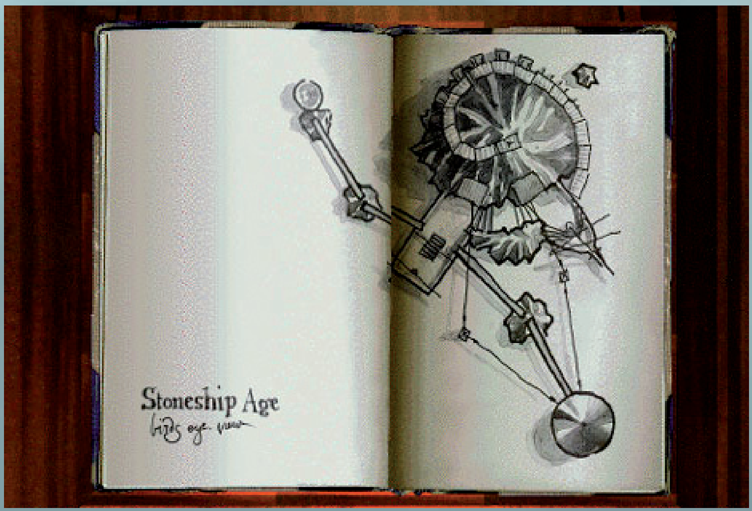
Released only a few months after fellow CD-ROM starlet *The 7th Guest*, it's been argued that *Myst* helped rapidly accelerate the PC-owning public's uptake of CD-ROM drives and could even be described as the

» Because each frame in the game was optimised for fast loading, *Myst* ran on pretty much any PC in 1993…



» … this undoubtedly contributed to the success of the title in the user-unfriendly days of Windows 3.1.





» Each 'Age' in Myst is contained within a rather attractive looking book. It's possible that this is an endearing nod to the interactive children's books that the Miller brothers first wanted to create.



» Although modern consoles could probably render this scene in real-time, back in the early-Nineties just seeing it pre-rendered made for a breathtaking experience.

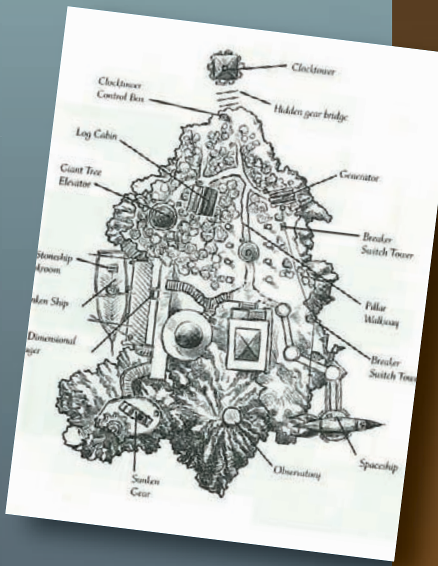
'killer app' that sold the medium to the gaming world. "Not a lot of people had the hardware for CD-ROMs back then," recalls Robyn. "I don't remember being concerned about this when we shipped *Myst*, maybe because we never expected it to sell like it did. But suddenly, almost overnight, people began buying CD-ROM drives like crazy. It was one of those sudden sea changes, and we were caught right up on the cusp of it."

However, Robyn is quick to downplay the perceived significance of the game. "I don't think *Myst* was responsible for that change, but I do think it was something that represented that change. And that whole 'Miller brothers' thing represented some of that. That's one of those things about being in a place at the right time." This overnight success meant that the siblings were quickly heralded as poster boys for a new generation of game designers and even appeared in a Gap clothing commercial – an event that still puzzles Robyn to this day: "It was downright weird; like I was outside myself, watching this bizarre phenomenon taking place."

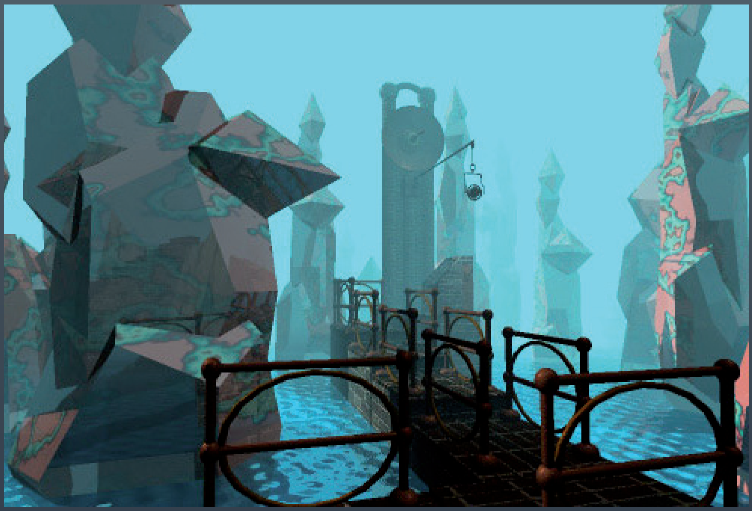
The healthy sales of the game (6 million copies sold to this day, and counting) proved one thing – the public adored it. However, many sectors of the gaming community were quick to turn their noses up at what they perceived to be a boring flick-screen puzzle game with no blood or gore (it's important to remember that id Software subjected the PC-gaming world to the visceral delights of *Doom* just a few months after the launch of *Myst*). Unsurprisingly, a negative critical reaction occurred, with several magazines granting *Myst* decidedly icy reviews. For once, the specialist press seemed hopelessly out of touch with the common gamer – but the response didn't surprise Robyn. "I think there was stuff that frustrated practised gamers. There were no command keys, there was only the mouse and one button, there was no avatar, the world was presented cinematically, and so on," he explains.

"Because of all this, *Myst* may have seemed almost too simple to gamers who were used to things that looked and felt like games. And yet this is partly what made *Myst* so popular with the majority of our audience – those who'd never played a game before. To them, *Myst* was approachable; it felt real."

Although his brother Rand still heads Cyan Worlds, Robyn decided to part company after completing work on *Riven* in 1997 and now runs his own film production studio, known as Land of Point, as well as indulging his musical side as part of a group called Ambo. Although he's turned his back on the videogame industry for now, he's still visibly thrilled by the astonishing success that *Myst* has enjoyed. "Creating a world from that blank slate – it was a rare and wonderful opportunity," he says with a smile. "But like I said, we never could have foreseen the overwhelming response. It blew us away. Thanks a ton to everybody who ever played *Myst*. Thank you all, sincerely!"



» The Miller brothers really freed their minds when it came to creating some of the more unusual environments.



» It's a testament to the quality of the Miller brother's work that scenes like this still look great after 15 years.



07

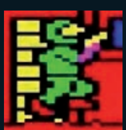
RETRO GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

FREE FALL

"AND I'M FREE, FREE FALLIN"



- » **PUBLISHER:** ACORNSOFT
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** BBC MICRO
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

NASA: pioneers of intergalactic exploration, masters of the stars and the last hope for *Star Trek* fans hoping that alien warp drives are discovered on one of their expeditions so we can all fly around the universe shouting 'engage!' from big armchairs.

But why do they do it? Anyone who's seen a sci-fi flick knows that no good can come of space travel. Alien overlords, humanity-destroying viruses and replicators that give you a bucket when you ask for black coffee.

In 1984, *Free Fall* gave us another great reason to take that bunch of space cowboys in Washington off our Christmas card lists for good.

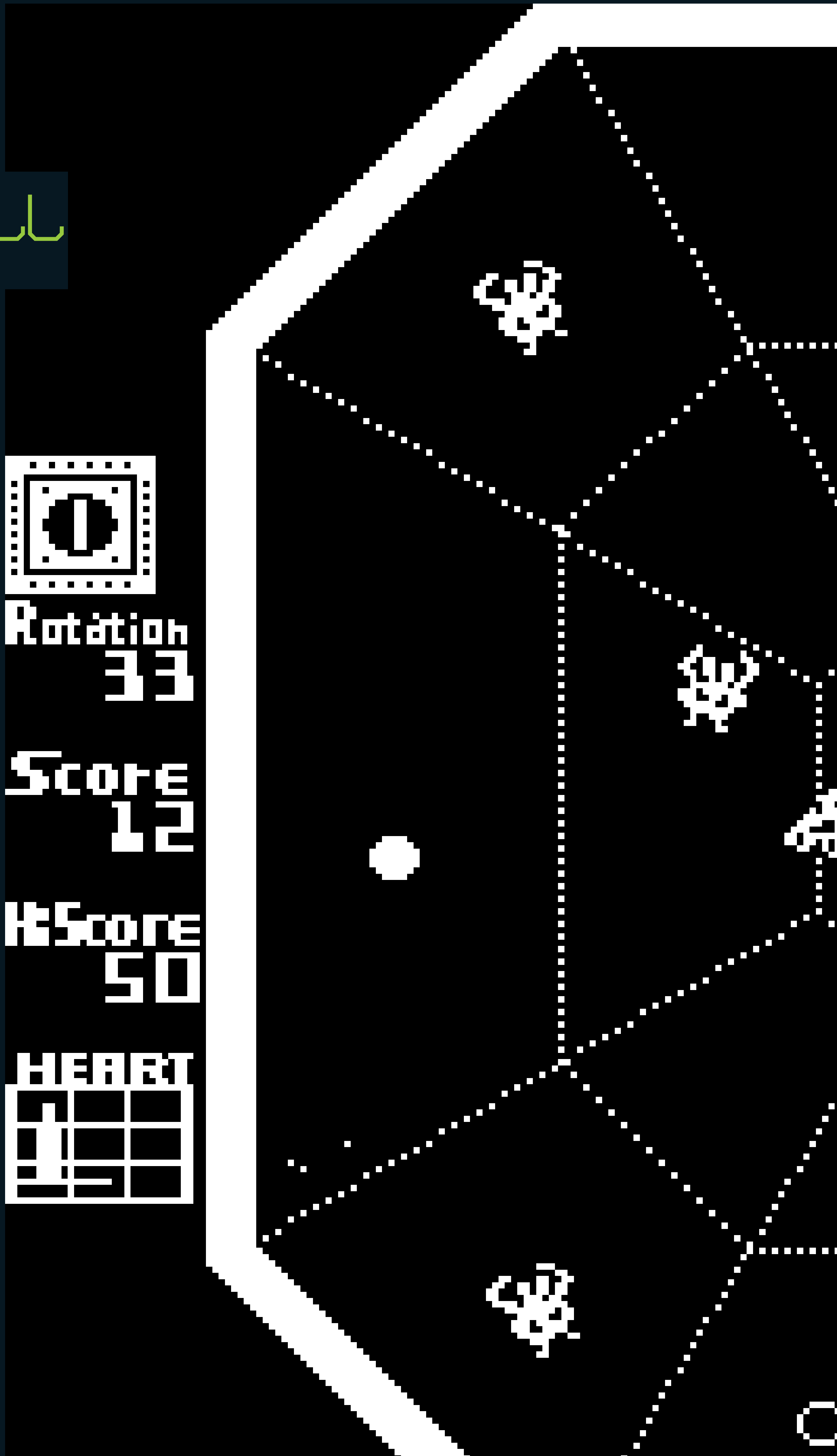
Here's the situation – you're sitting in Deep Space Station Coriolis, somewhere in a NASA-discovered galaxy. You turn the page of the seedy tabloid you're reading – *'The Daily Class W: Wolf-Rayet Star'* – while the NASA-discovered warp drive hums in the background. As you take a sip of your NASA-issue coffee, you notice someone suddenly drop to the ground in front of you, then another, and another. Sensing these people were doing more than just taking an unscheduled nap, you quickly throw on your spacesuit.

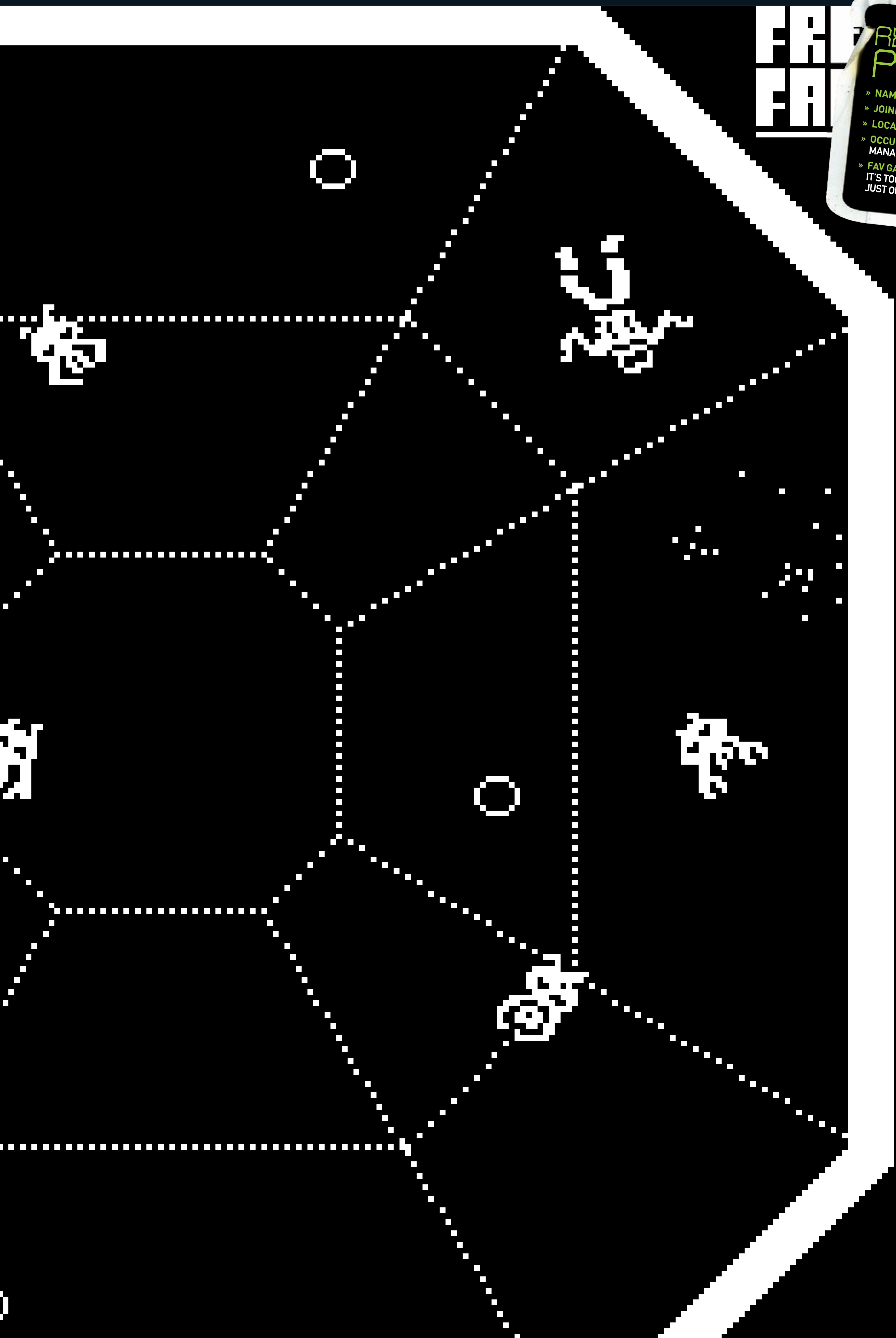
Now let's cut to the chase – everyone but you died, the crew-gassing culprits were the fearsome Alphoid invaders who are now streaming in through the airlock and there are vital computer records on board to protect.

In the octagonal area of *Free Fall*, you must destroy the Alphoids with only your fists and feet while using your air supply to jet around in the unstable rotational gravity. Craboids, Lobstoids, Batoids and Waspoids are all foes you will encounter, each with their own methods of attack, but things get a bit easier with the help of emerging bombs – just remember: explosions hurt!

If you take one to the face, the game's up. You can also perish by catching the brunt of a critical Alphoid hit, at which point your convulsing body drains the remaining oxygen from your suit and you become just another forgotten casualty of deep space. And we all know whose fault that is…

Want to appear in the magazine? Then be sure to upload classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net



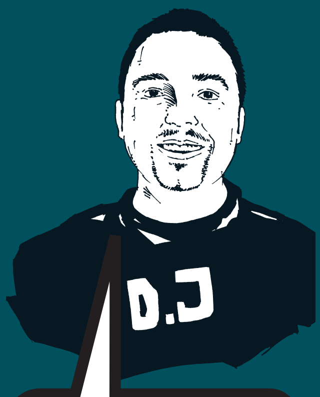


RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** ROB KUCZYNSKI
- » **JOINED:** 29 JUL 2008
- » **LOCATION:** PARIS, FRANCE
- » **OCCUPATION:** ONLINE SUPPORT MANAGER
- » **FAV GAMES SYSTEM:** IT'S TOO DIFFICULT TO CHOOSE JUST ONE!

RETRORATED

» DOWNLOAD RELEASES



Well, it's taken forever but Capcom's high-def rejig of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* is finally here and it's ace as well. In fact, Xbox Live Arcade is having a pretty good time at the moment, with even Rare's *Banjo-Kazooie* finally getting a release. Worry not though, as there's also some fine efforts for both the PlayStation Network and Nintendo's Virtual Console.







retro GAMER SIZZLER





INFORMATION

- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- **COST:** 1,200 POINTS

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO HD REMIX

Every reader should know by now that the Retro Gamer team aren't massive fans of *Street Fighter II* and vastly prefer the incredible *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*. Every reader should also know by now that the score at the bottom of this page is not in keeping with the above statement – so what on Earth is going on?

Well, we remain firm in our conviction when we state that the original *Street Fighter II*, despite its importance in videogame history, is looking a little old, but that doesn't mean we've not enjoyed its many spin-offs. So we now come to what is easily the best version of *Street Fighter II* to hit the inside of an arcade, and as well as featuring the same classic gameplay of old, it's complete with splendid new high-definition visuals and remixed music. Come on, this was always going to end in a high number.

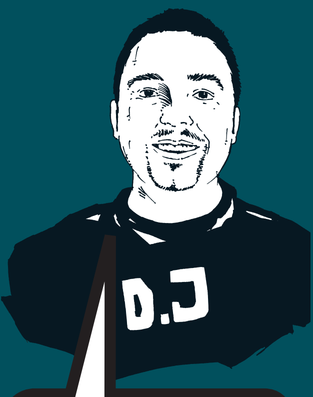
Arguably the most impressive aspect of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* (hereafter known as *Turbo HD*) is just how jaw-droppingly amazing it looks. It takes a little while for your brain to fully register that the original animations are still hiding underneath and the uninformed will initially see a game with animation that can't hope to match its silky smooth visuals.

Once you sit down and play *Turbo HD*, though, everything changes and you're instantly recaptured by the magic that made the original so entertaining to play over and over again. Every single character – although we still have very little love for Dee Jay, M Bison and T Hawk – remains perfectly balanced, bouts are quick and exhilarating to play, while the controls are amazingly responsive. We'd definitely recommend ye olde Hori Stick for best results, of course, but we're still surprised at just how many Dragon Punches we were actually able to pull off when needed.

We're also suitably impressed with the stability that online play offers. Obviously it's never going to be perfect, but the early beta test must have definitely helped, as we've now had hundreds of games online with hardly any issues (the only time we encountered any serious lag was when playing someone in Japan). In fact, so solid is the performance that all that's missing is a picture of the person you're playing against, as we found ourselves going head-to-head against the same people for hours at a time, just like we did in the arcades.

Turbo HD has had something of a lengthy gestation period – it was originally due for an autumn 2007 release – but the wait has definitely been worth it. Backbone Entertainment (no stranger to this remake lark) and Udon Comics have created quite possibly one of the greatest updates we've ever played. Mindful of the game's original pedigree (it's possible to play with the original animations), *Turbo HD* is more than a case of a developer giving a title a quick nip and tuck and throwing it out the door. This has been crafted with genuine care and respect and our only fear is that it's going to get left behind once Capcom's sensational-looking port of *Street Fighter IV* gets released. This is how all games should be remade.

94%



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retro GAMER SIZZLER





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94%




BANJO-KAZOOIE

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
» **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **COST:** 1,200 POINTS

There have been some rather harsh reviews of *Banjo-Kazooie* recently. Many have claimed that it looks woefully out of date, is lacking in style and just can't compete with today's modern platform games, which would be fine, except for the fact that since its release, only *Super Mario Galaxy* (and possibly *Super Mario Sunshine*) has actually eclipsed it.

Granted, the water sections can be a little frustrating, mainly due to the slow pace at which Banjo moves, but make no mistake, this is a fantastic game, which, bar a few issues, is still the greatest platforming alternative to that moustachioed plumber.

Take the glorious visuals, for example. The textures are incredibly simplistic (3D ages far more quickly than 2D art does), but the levels themselves remain full of life and character, while the hi-res sheen now makes it far easier to search out all those hidden Jingos and Jiggies. Banjo, Kazooie and the rest of the world's inhabitants are also beautifully designed and if you don't find yourself tapping your foot along to the opening's hoedown then check your heart – you're probably already dead. Then there's the truly tremendous music that rivals anything from Mario's back catalogue of past hits and the engaging way that everyone speaks. In short, *Banjo-Kazooie* is an aural and visual treat.

Ultimately though, it was *Banjo-Kazooie*'s gameplay that continually impressed us in the past and it remains fantastic today. Banjo and Kazooie are still one of the best double acts in videogame history, levels are exceptionally well designed, there's plenty of variety to earn Jiggies and collecting items isn't actually a chore. This is 3D platforming of the highest order and it's absolutely astounding to think that so few recent releases have actually been able to better it in the past decade.

Add in some extremely well-thought-out Achievements, and amazingly polished emulation, the inclusion of the fabled Stop 'N' Swop and excellently mapped controls and a past Nintendo classic becomes a future Microsoft hit. All that's left now is for Rare to release *Jet Force Gemini* and the amazing *Blast Corps*.

92%

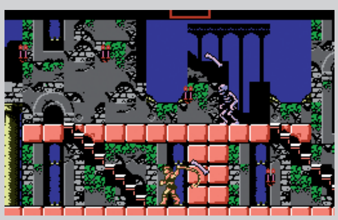


TENCHU: SHADOW ASSAULT

» **PUBLISHER:** FROM SOFTWARE
» **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **COST:** 800 POINTS

We're all for developers that bravely combine different genres, but this stealth/*Bomberman* hybrid is a bit too strange. The single-player missions are relatively entertaining and successfully capture the spirit of the previous games, but the multiplayer is just a complete and utter mess. The cramped arenas mean that frustration soon sets in and you'll simply wish that From Software had focused its attention on the single-player experience instead.

51%



CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **DOWNLOAD:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **COST:** 500 POINTS

We've waited ages for the third (and best) *Castlevania* NES game and *Dracula's Curse* really doesn't disappoint. Filled with all-new characters, excellent level design and some great boss battles – it's classic *Castlevania*. The visuals look great, multiple routes mean there's lots of replay value, while the soundtrack is very accomplished for an 8-bit machine. An excellent *Castlevania* adventure that we've fallen in love with all over again.

89%



FORGOTTEN WORLDS

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DOWNLOAD:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **COST:** 800 POINTS

The Virtual Console can be a nightmare to recommend games on as you never know when a better version is on the way. If you're a fan of *Forgotten Worlds* and are betting on the superior TurboGrafx-CD version not getting a release any time soon then download this immediately. The small sprites are perfectly formed, the music is authentic and the control system works exceptionally well under the circumstances. A decent conversion of an entertaining shoot-'em-up.

81%



THEME PARK

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
» **DOWNLOAD:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
» **COST:** £3.49

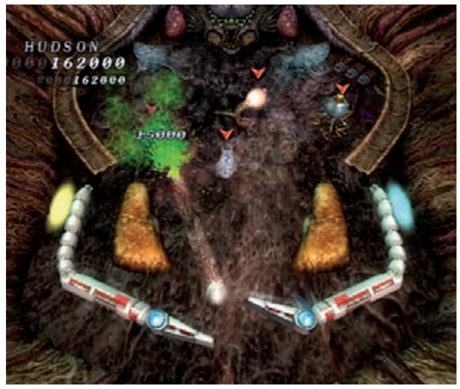
There's a shocking lack of PSone classics appearing on the UK PSN service, so we're glad EA remains committed to releasing as many games as possible. Predictably, *Theme Park* is an excellent game that's sadly hampered by a new control system that just isn't quick enough. As a result the entire game suffers, especially when the action hots up. *Theme Park* is still a fantastic game, it's just that the new interface makes the great gameplay unnecessarily hard.

72%

RETRORATED

» DOWNLOAD RELEASES

ALIEN CRUSH RETURNS







INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON SOFT
- » **DOWNLOAD:** WIIWARE
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

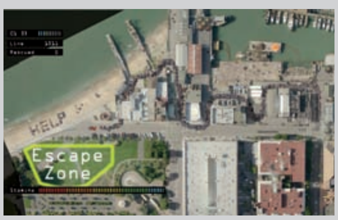
We've had high hopes for Hudson's sequel to its pinball hit *Alien Crush*, and while it's not quite what we were hoping for, neither is it a crushing disappointment. The pinball genre has come along massively – digitally and physically – since the release of *Alien Crush* in 1988, and gamers are used to clever scoring mechanics and plenty of bells and whistles to draw them in.

Alien Crush Returns is a huge improvement over the original game, and boasts particularly icky looking enemies, disgustingly organic table designs that look as if they've been plucked from the mind of HR Giger and solid if rather unspectacular table designs. Several modes have been included ranging from a (very) short Story mode to a nifty Versus option that allows you to play against three other players over Wi-Fi in a bid to score 10 million points as quickly as possible.

Then there are the new gameplay additions, which allow you to boost, reverse or even split your ball once you have built up enough power. Controls are also intuitive and responsive with the B and Z buttons being used to activate flippers, while a quick shake of the controller nudges the table. It all works extremely well and adds a new twist on the gameplay of old.

Unfortunately, there's a big 'but' though, and here it is. Compared to other pinball games we've played recently, most notably Xbox Live Arcade's excellent *Pinball FX*, *Alien Crush Returns*' special features and table designs feel a little bit lacking, and there's no real notable difference between each table, meaning the experience can begin to feel quite samey. There's certainly enough here to warrant a download if you were a fan of the original game, but it's a shame that everything feels so streamlined. Here's hoping that should an update of *Devil's Crush* appear it doesn't suffer from the same fate.

68%



THE LAST GUY

- » **PUBLISHER:** SONY JAPAN
- » **DOWNLOAD:** PLAYSTATION NETWORK
- » **COST:** £4.99

Don't be put off by the Google Earth-style visuals, as this is essentially a flashy re-imagining of Sega's 1984 game *Flicky*. By altering the viewpoint and replacing Flicky with a superhero, the chicks he had to rescue with trapped people and the cats with zombies, Sony has created a great game that's only real downfall is its steep difficulty curve. If you're looking for something well polished and refreshingly different you'll find *The Last Guy* to be well worth its £5 asking price.

81%



VIGILANTE 8: ARCADE

- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DOWNLOAD:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS

Now this is a real disappointment. The *Vigilante 8* games were a guilty pleasure on the N64 and PlayStation, but this update leaves a very bitter taste in our mouths. We've no problem with the ugly visuals, but the loose controls, uninspiring track design and lacklustre online modes are unforgivable. It's almost as if developer Isopod Labs is doing an experiment to discover what a game's like once all the fun's been sucked out of it. Needless to say the results aren't very good.

49%

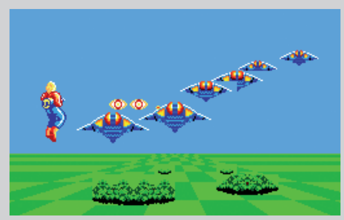


METAL SLUG 2

- » **PUBLISHER:** D4 ENTERPRISE
- » **DOWNLOAD:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- » **COST:** 900 POINTS

It's hard to recommend Nazca's sequel to the excellent *Metal Slug*, mainly because of its slowdown, something which is only exacerbated by running at 50Hz. It's a real pity because this is otherwise an excellent little blaster that's once again full of humour, has brilliantly designed bosses and looks truly sensational in places. Considering the speed at which AES games are appearing on the VC, you're better off saving your cash for the far superior *Metal Slug X*. We will be.

70%



SPACE HARRIER

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DOWNLOAD:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
- » **COST:** 500 POINTS

Let's face it, if you're going to make *Space Harrier* available as a download, you either use the original arcade game or you don't bother. What you certainly don't do is make the Master System port available, as it simply lacks everything that made the arcade game such a joy to play. Garish-looking sprites hobble along with the speed of an old-age pensioner, bosses are ridiculously easy to defeat and the beautiful music of the arcade game has been replaced by a tinny dirge. Woeful stuff.

44%

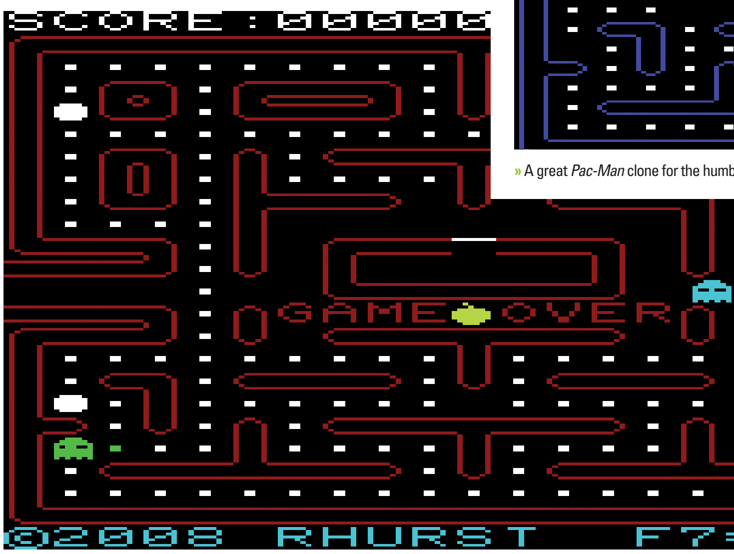


Welcome to our brand new homebrew section. From now on you'll be able to find out what games are worth downloading (or buying), what's been happening over the last month and what remakes are worth taking for a spin.
We aim to cover all aspects of the homebrew community, so if you want to see something in the magazine be sure to tell us about it.





» A great *Pac-Man* clone for the humble VIC-20.





» The development of *Quikman* first began in 1984. Amazing!

PAC UP YOUR TROUBLES IN YOUR OLD KITBAG

QUIKMAN 2008



FORMAT: UNEXPANDED VIC-20
DEVELOPED BY: ROBERT HURST
LINK: HTTP://ROBERT.HURST-RI.US/COMMODORE/VIC20.HTML
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Quikman 2008 **is a totally and absolutely unashamed clone of Namco's *Pac-Man* for the unexpanded VIC-20. The player controls the iconic yellow consumer as he munches his way through the small dots and occasional piece of fruit lying around a maze, all the time avoiding the pursuing spectres until a power pill can be devoured and the tables turned.**

All very standard fare so far and several variants exist already for the VIC, but what is interesting about *Quikman 2008*, however, is the story of its origins, which manages to be almost as entertaining as the game itself. So sit back and let **Retro Gamer** spin you an entertaining yarn of long-forgotten code and shiny new resource tools…

Developed over the course of a week in 1984, it was originally written during the VIC's commercial dotage but, rather than offering the game around to prospective publishers, author Robert Hurst instead squirreled it away on a cassette. Hurst was just finishing college and *Quikman* was almost a farewell to home computers as he prepared to embark on a career with mainframes. But the original *Quikman* wasn't quite finished, at least not entirely to its developer's satisfaction… and leaving projects incomplete like that can really niggle at programmers, even for years afterwards!

On rediscovering his micro computing heritage nearly a quarter of a century after he had originally downed his tools, the not-quite-complete nature of Hurst's final 8-bit game became somewhat irksome and began to gnaw away at him like a dog worrying a particularly juicy bone. So, like George Lucas returning to the editing suite with the original *Star Wars* trilogy and a budget for state-of-the-art CGI, he decided that it was time to revisit his original code with modern cross-development tools in order to make a few modifications. After transferring everything over to an emulator-friendly format, the original *Quikman* program was disassembled into source code, some of the routines were optimised and all of those annoying issues that had been bothering Hurst for the past 20-plus years were finally dealt with.

And the result of all this work is pretty remarkable, because although the original *Quikman* (which is also available for download, along with other previously unreleased programs that were transferred at the same time) was already a credible rendition of *Pac-Man*, this remix takes that yellow ball and runs with it so, while not being a perfect interpretation, it's possibly the best clone ever released on the unexpanded VIC and gives products such as Commodore's own cartridge-based *Jelly Monsters* a good run for their money as well. High praise indeed!

It has to be said that the sound is somewhat sparse since it's been reduced to just 'eating' noises, but it's serviceable, and graphically *Quikman 2008* does the job admirably, especially considering the actual resolution of the machine. There are a few tiny cosmetic hiccups and glitches here and there, but otherwise this is a very smooth-moving, enjoyable and playable game that builds up to a really frenetic pace on the later levels.

86%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

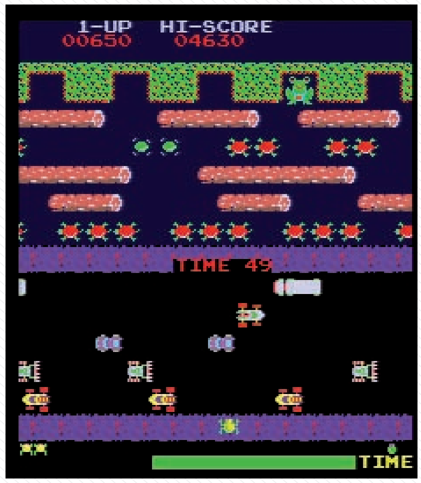
FROGGER

» **DEVELOPER:** RICHARD 'EXECUTIONER' WILSON » **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.WINAPE.NET/DOWNLOADS.JSP » **REVIEWED:** JASON KELK

Back in 1981, *Frogger* took arcades by storm with its unusual mission of guiding a frog across a busy motorway and then over a river to safety. It begins fairly easily, but as the game progresses snakes patrol the central island between the road and the river, alligators lie in wait and the traffic becomes thicker and faster. And if that wasn't enough to keep things interesting, there are little temptations for the amphibian avatar such as lady frogs needing a little assistance across the river.

And now Amstrad CPC Plus users can relive the magic in their own homes! And since this rendition uses the expanded hardware of the CPC Plus range, it really does look and sound the part. More importantly, that attention to detail extends to how the game plays; the arcade experience has been faithfully reproduced on the Amstrad, so a game that was already considered a classic remains so in its new home.

89%



» A truly great CPC conversion of an arcade classic.





» *Hobgoblin* is fairly fun, but we've played better clones.

HOBGOBLIN

» **DEVELOPER:** GR8 SOFTWARE » **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://GR8.ATARI.PL/ » **REVIEWED:** JASON KELK

The Golden Orb of Altoris has been nicked and Prince Zanock has to retrieve it before the Hobgoblins overrun the land. Zanock's quest involves a trek through a spooky forest and then on to the castle, both of which are populated by ghosts, toad men and skeletons that are out to get the prince. Luckily Zanock isn't defenceless, starting armed with throwing knives and able to pick up better weapons dropped by some of his foes when killed.

Hats off to the newly-formed GR8 Software for being brave enough to publish new 8-bit games, because there's always room in the 'market' for people who are willing to do so, it's just a shame that this first title won't make as large an impression as some of its previous works. The main problem *Hobgoblin* has is its pedigree, the original game was at best mediocre and adding cosmetic enhancements to that base hasn't improved things as such, so while it can be quite fun to play, the frustration that even some of the earliest screen layouts can cause along with the random issuing of the better weaponry are barriers to enjoyment that quite a few gamers may well fail to see past.

71%

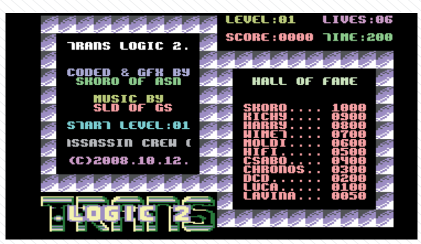
TRANS LOGIC 2

» **DEVELOPER:** GÁBOR VARGA » **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://PLUS4WORLD.POWWEB.COM/SOFTWARE/TRANS_LOGIC_2 » **REVIEWED:** JASON KELK

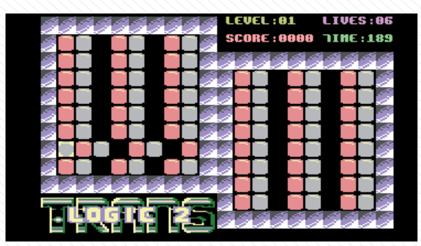
Trans Logic 2's idea is very simple; there are two panes on the screen, one with a starting pattern of coloured tiles and the other filled with the final design that the player has to re-create – of course things aren't quite as simple as they sound, since individual tiles can't be repositioned and instead everything is shuffled around in columns and rows.

The graphics are attractive and colourful, the music acceptable and some programming magic has scrunched everything so that it fits into just 16K. However, *Trans Logic 2* can only be recommended to players who like a challenge due to its steep difficulty curve. There are a couple of easy levels that act as an introduction, but it isn't long before they become very taxing and thinking ahead even a couple of moves can be baffling. In short, it's well presented and worth playing if you can enjoy this sort of mental workout.

77%



» A puzzle title to really get stuck into. Don't say we didn't warn you.



WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» Cauldwell returns with *Albatrossity* for the Spectrum.

» Cauldwell continues

You can't keep a good coder down and prolific Spectrum genius Jonathan Cauldwell has announced a brand new title called *Albatrossity* that he's currently working on. In typical Cauldwell fashion he's decided to blend two distinct genres together – a side-on platformer with a golf game in this case – and the results are already looking highly promising. Expect the definitive **Retro Gamer** verdict in a future issue.



» Hurry, before all of Simon's *I Project* releases are gone.

» Keep your 'I' on this one

Simon Quernhorst (featured in last month's Homebrew Heroes) has revealed that his latest Atari 2600 release, *I Project,* will be getting a limited run of cartridges. For just 33 euros you'll receive the game, a patch and a badge and some excellent artwork that's been drawn by Celal Kandemiroglu (of *Katakis* and *Turrican* art fame). With only 36 copies on offer, supplies will be predictably limited so head on over to www.quernhorst.de/atari/ip.html to secure a copy.

» Meet xnPlay

Since Microsoft's new NXE update has arrived, its new homebrew community section has already grown rapidly. Luckily, xnPlay is on hand to offer you an in-depth look at all the latest games. With titles costing anything from 200 to 800 points, it's important to know what represents value for money and this is where xnPlay excels. A sister site of Retro Remakes, xnPlay is a great introduction to what could become one of the 360's most bustling communities. Visit it now at www.xnplay.co.uk.

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» Bullet Witch

Being keen shmup fans at **Retro Gamer** we're always on the lookout for our next fix – especially if it can be played while we're at work – so we always tend to keep a close eye on homebrew sites like the2bears.com and Shoot The Core. It's a good job we do as we'd have otherwise missed *Bogumeguriro Witch*, which is a fantastic-looking bullet hell shooter from Astro Port. Little is known about it yet, but we definitely like its cartoony style. More news as we get it.



» It's now possible to stream video on a Spectrum.

» Crossing the streams

Thanks to a lot of technical jiggery-pokery and a little help from fellow World Of Spectrum member, LCD, Dylan Smith (Winston on the World Of Spectrum site) has created an Ethernet card for the ZX Spectrum and the pair have successfully managed to stream video (the file itself was by LCD and is a sequence of SCREEN$ images) on Sir Clive's classic machine. If you don't believe it's possible then check out the results at www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf8rz0sb298.

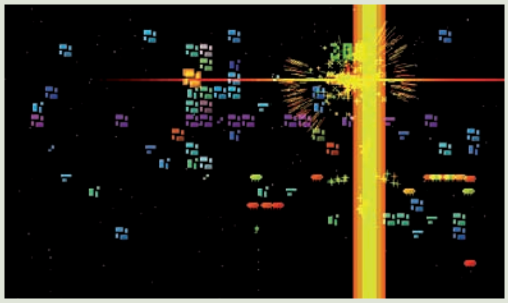
FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on Retro Gamer's flash game of the month. This month we look at Mirror's Edge 2D.

BASED ON THE recently released Electronic Arts game, this is an official project with Borne Games and is absolutely fantastic. The arrow keys move Faith around the detailed cityscapes, while the pace she can reach gives a sensational feeling of speed. So fun we've been playing it more than the original. Find it now at www.bornegames.com/?page_id=369.

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



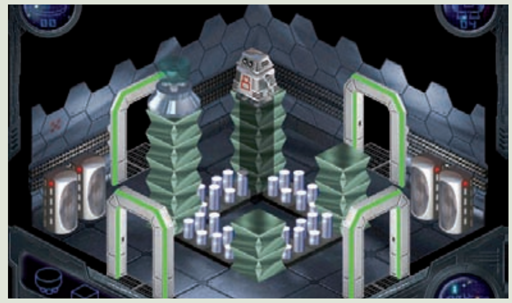
MILLENIPEDE

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.ZOLYX.CO.UK/MILLENIPEDE

A tip to all remakers out there. If you want to get your game into the mag then send Darran a shmup, as it's bound to get a mention. Still even if our editor wasn't interested in things that go bang and boom, it's easy to see why we've been playing so much of *Millenipede* recently.

Originally coded in just seven days, it's a superb fusion of *Centipede* and *Millipede* with responsive controls, excellent visuals and the sort of raucous sound effects that make you think you're back in an Eighties arcade.

It can be tough in places and yes it's not strictly a remake of just one game, but it's been giving us so much joy that we just had to include it. Brilliant.



ALIEN 8

» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://RETROSPEC.SGN.NET/GAME/ALIEN8

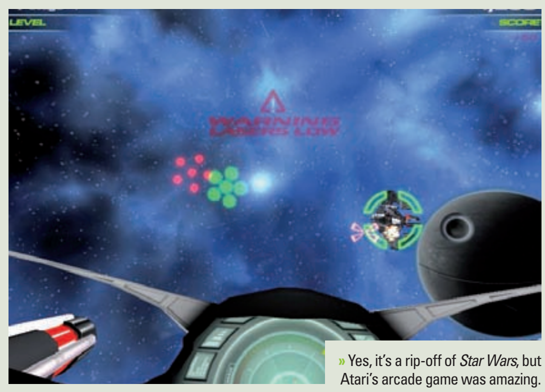
Considering the current issue boasts an isometric slant, it seems only fair to mention this brilliant update of an old Ultimate classic. Similar in style to the excellent remake of *Head Over Heels* and available to download for both Mac and PC, Ignacio Perez Gil accurately captures the spirit of the original Ultimate hit, while giving it a fresh new lick of paint (courtesy of fellow Retrospec coder D-o-S) that makes it look absolutely sensational.

It's not quite up to the elegance of Tomaz Kac's superb *Head Over Heels* remake, but this remains a stellar effort that's bound to please fans of both the original game and isometric releases in general.

The only thing we want to know now is when is someone going to remake *Sabre Wulf*?

Remake of the Month





» Yes, it's a rip-off of *Star Wars*, but Atari's arcade game was amazing.

3D STARSTRIKE

» **DOWNLOAD:** WWW.STARSTRIKE.URBANINTERACTIVE.NET

The quality of the retro remakes that we keep coming across constantly amazes us. So much so, in fact, that we'll be actively supporting them within our hallowed pages. While some will no doubt wonder why someone would want to pour endless hours into a project that's unlikely to ever make them any money, it's something we wholeheartedly applaud and truly appreciate.

When we discover titles like Urban Interactive's excellent remake of *Starstrike* it not only makes us wonder why it's not appearing on Xbox Live Arcade, but makes our lunch breaks a lot more exciting.

Effectively a remake of *3D Starstrike*, which in turn was an excellent rip-off of Atari's brilliant *Star Wars* game, this is a truly exceptional piece of work that features stunning visuals, wonderfully tight controls (all mouse driven) and a pleasing difficulty curve that constantly drags you back in for just one more go. It's been five long years in the making, but *3D Starstrike* is a wonderful blaster (always a bonus for us) that features an online leaderboard, which so far, we've not even made a small dent in. If you're a fan of either the Spectrum original or Atari's classic blaster, then we recommend you download this as soon as you possibly can. Quite simply one of the best remakes we've ever played.









» **Above:** Graham's remake of *Exolon* works on both PCs and Macs. » **Top Right:** Graham only handled graphic duties on *Head Over Heels*. » **Right:** *Wizball* is already being hailed as one of the best remakes around and rightly so.

HOMEBREW HEROES

THIS MONTH'S HERO IS **GRAHAM GORING**, A WELL-KNOWN FACE ON THE REMAKE SCENE WHO'S MADE SOME EXCELLENT REMAKES AND ISN'T AFRAID TO MINCE HIS WORDS...

Retro Gamer: When did you first begin programming?
Graham Goring: In 1985 on the ZX Spectrum 48K+. Me and my chum James Curry would make these self-playing 'movies' where a blob moved around the screen. When we discovered UDGs, the quality of our CG output started to rival ILM.

RG: How did you get into remaking?
GG: It was when Richard Jordan was mooting the idea of *Klass Of 99* on comp.sys.sinclair. I berated him to let me try doing the graphics, which I eventually partially did.

Before that, though, I dabbled a bit with doing remakes on the SAM Coupé. And whenever I learn a new language the very first thing I write is a remake of *Robot* (aka *Zombies/Daleks*).

RG: How long does a typical game take to create and are you working on anything at the moment?
GG: I tend to turn around a game in about a year, which is quite a long time compared to most remakers.

At the moment I'm making slow progress on a game, which is like *Defender*, only with knobs on in the shape of a veneer of strategy and scads or new enemies and weapons. I'm a huge fan of *Strike Force* (*Defender 3*). Sven 'Ptoing' Ruthner should be on pixelling duties so it'll look nice, if a little drab. (Don't worry Sven, he put a wink emoticon here – Ed).

RG: Why aren't you making titles at Retrospec at the moment?
GG: Well, I'm still on the mailing list and occasionally contribute a message, but I know that my involvement in a project is generally a kiss of death and so I try to avoid piping up too much. Plus I really have no interest in just straight remakes any more.

Oddly, I've just finished a project, which is almost remakey, in that it takes the core elements of *Deactivators* and makes something far more contemporary out of them. That's more my cup of tea and something I'll continue with in the future.

RG: What do you feel is your greatest remake achievement?
GG: *Wizball*. I mean I love *Exolon* and *Cybernoid II* but they're pretty simplistic games and so remaking them was a case of using just a bit of spit and polish, but *Wizball* has a lot of nuances that I hope I captured.

RG: You've worked on *Cybernoid, Exolon, Jetpac* and *Wizball*. Are you a closet shmup fan?
GG: Not closeted at all! I think *R-Type* is just about one of the most perfect games ever (with the series definitely reaching its acme with *R-Type Delta*). I mean bullet hell games can just sod off, but proper shoot-'em-ups are really great fun.

RG: Why did you set up Arsecast?
GG: I'd mulled over the idea with Richard Jordan for a while because I was fed up with the rampant back-pattery in remakes and indie games. No one seemed willing to point at something and say 'that's shit', so I thought the noble thing to do was to start being nasty about people's hard work from behind a cowardly shield of anonymity.

RG: You often have some quite controversial views, particularly on companies ripping off homebrew community ideas. Have you got into any trouble with them?
GG: Oddly, no. They seem to either ignore what I say or – on the occasion that they send me a message – they've enjoyed the savaging I've given their games. Obviously it is the minority that contact me though. The rest are just tossers.

RG: How do you feel about new homebrew developments like Microsoft's new Community service?
GG: The thing seems promisingly open, in the sense that it appears to be 80 per cent shite. Which is how it should be – there's no fun in finding a diamond if you haven't had to rummage around in turds for it.

RG: Why do you think homebrew coding remains so popular?
GG: Because of the glamour of videogames. And the comparative ease of it these days with excellent tools such as Game Maker and the continual dumbing down of 'proper' languages like C#.

Plus, it's also a very good way to get into the gaming industry.

HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games Graham can't live without

1 **Cave Story** Bursting with humour and character this has yet to be beaten in the Metroidvania stakes. An utterly charming game.

2 **Rescue The Beagles** Funny, addictive and endlessly replayable, this is cuteness personified.

3 **Gesundheit!** Probably the best marriage of graphics and sound ever in a lovely puzzle game that makes me smile like no other.

4 **Aquaria** Full of things to do and a wonderful sense of mystery, a really polished game of exploration.

5 **La-Mulana** Punishingly old-school and as a result jam-packed with secrets which you will probably never, ever discover.

SCORE<1> HI-SCORE SCORE<2>

0060 0000

Set lasers to stun

SHOOT-'EM-UP SPECIAL

To ensure our 60th issue goes off with a bang we've decided to interview the creators of two of the most iconic blasters of all time. Taito's *Space Invaders* and Irem's *R-Type*. But that's not all. We'll also be looking at some of the greatest shoot-'em-ups ever made, as well as classic shmups that gamers have long since forgotten about. Don't miss it.

MORE EXCITING FEATURES

» The creators of *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future* reveal the difficulties of porting their classic 2D Mega Drive adventure game to the 128-bit Dreamcast.

» It's a fantastic computer/console that helped launch the career of Hideo Kojima, but what do you really know about the excellent MSX? **Retro Gamer** reveals all.

» Advertising in videogames has never been bigger than it is now, so **Retro Gamer** decided to travel back in time to discover how it all started. The results are very interesting…

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RETRO DIRECTORY

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE LISTING ITS FAVOURITE WEBSITES AND INTERVIEWING SOME OF THEIR KEY MEMBERS. THIS ISSUE WE SPEAK TO RICK LINDEMAN ABOUT HIS MAC EMU TROUBLESHOOTING WEBSITE, MACRETRO (THAT'S EMU AS IN EMULATION, NOT EMU AS IN THE BIRD)

THE RETRO GAMER DIRECTORY

ATARI AGE
www.atariage.com
Excellent resource site dedicated to all aspects of Atari gaming.

ATARI ORG
www.atari.org
Another superb Atari site with every machine from the 2600 to arcade classics.

AUSSIE ARCADE
www.aussiearcade.com.au
A fantastic arcade forum catering for an Aussie audience.

CPC ZONE
www.cpczone.net
Excellent site for the Amstrad range of computers with all the latest news and reviews.

C64 GAME ENDINGS
www.c64endings.co.uk/
Over 260 endings for classic and not so classic C64 games.

LEMON64
www.lemon64.com
Superb Commodore 64 site filled with insightful reviews and a friendly forum.

LEMON AMIGA
www.lemonamiga.com
This great Amiga site is run by Kim Lemon, owner of Lemon 64.

MACRETRO
www.macretro.tk
Getting emulators up and running on the Mac, this is a brilliant site.

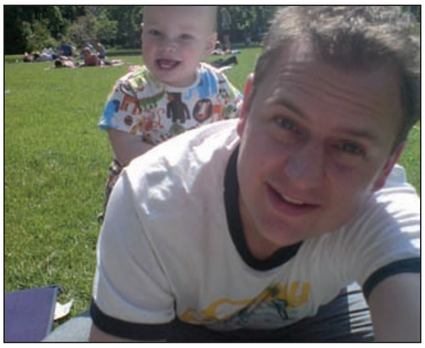
NEO-GEO.COM
www.neo-geo.com
Dedicated to SNK's systems, but with lots of other stuff to enjoy.

WEEKEND GAMER
www.weekend-gamer.co.uk
Great site that covers a range of topics, from TV to gaming.

SYSTEM16
www.system16.com
Sega focused, but also dedicated to covering as many arcade games as possible.

NTSC-UK
http://ntsc-uk.domino.org/
This site is devoted to imports, but there's a retro section with useful advice on rare imports.

OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
http://old-computers.com
If you think the 2600 is ancient, visit this fascinating site.



Retro Gamer: When did you set up MacRetro?
Rick Lindeman: I set up MacRetro in early 2004. I just bought an Apple Mac and discovered that there weren't that many games for it around. It was then I went looking for a way to play my favourite game ever, *Sensible World Of Soccer.* Trying to get it working wasn't easy. I had to find all kinds of files, and also discovered that many people were experiencing problems with Amiga Emulation. After helping lots of people, across *Sensible Soccer* forums like sensiblesoccer.de, to set up *Sensi* on the Mac, I decided I should post the information online.

RG: Why base it around Mac coverage instead of PC emulation?
RL: I simply discovered that there wasn't a lot of information available about emulation on the Mac. Most of the time sites just provided you with an emulator and little else. I wanted to help people a bit further, so I set up the site [MacRetro], which includes various links to emulators, but also some hints and troubleshooting stories as well. Furthermore, I tried to add information on which games to play and how to play them. After creating a small version in Dutch, I received so many responses requesting an English version – mainly because people couldn't find an overview – so I expanded and translated the site.

> "YOU WILL FIND NO EASIER OR MORE HELPFUL RESOURCE THAN MACRETRO"

RG: What gives it the edge over similar sites?
RL: It doesn't just provide you with links; it actively helps you with background information about setting the software up, and also gives information about the best games and technical information on each system. It has a clean and user-friendly interface, without cluttered-looking menus or choices, so people that require help with Mac emulation, or those who simply want to look up something quickly and simply, will find no easier or more helpful resource than MacRetro.

RG: What's the most popular part of the site?
RL: I'd say it's the list of emulators. It's a nice comprehensive and clear list where you can find the things you need.

RG: How can our readers contribute?
RL: By keeping an eye open for new emulation developments on the Mac, and now the iPhone as well, and letting me know. The iPhone has a huge potential for emulation that's just itching to be unleashed, so I recently updated the site to include an iPhone section now.

RG: What would you say is your favourite Mac emulator and why?
RL: Probably Boycott Advance. When playing *Advance Wars* on it, the best turn-based strategy game in the history of mankind, it actually improves areas of the game. Through the emulator I am able to save my progress, and mail it to a friend who can reply. It's basically mail chess for the 21st Century. (Naturally we both have the original.)

Also, I love MaxUAE. People have updated most of the *Sensible Soccer* data files, and now I can play the game as if it was released now, with Klaas-Jan Huntelaar at Ajax. This is all thanks to the people at www.sensiblesoccer.de who keep on updating it.

DEEPER LOOK – WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

MacRetro
www.macretro.ricklindeman.nl

If you're currently tearing large tufts of bloodied hair from your red swollen scalp as you try to get emulators to do anything remotely sensible on your Mac, you need look no further than MacRetro. Rick has created a wonderful online resource bank of emulators and hints, and has displayed the information in such a way that is easy to navigate.

You also get a real sense that Rick is passionate about his gaming, providing links to scans of old gaming magazines and emulation sites, among many other gaming-related things. His dedication to helping Mac owners experience the games they love, is clearly apparent. Check out his site at www.macretro.ricklindeman.nl.



RETRO MUSEUM
www.retrocomputermuseum.co.uk
What's interesting about this is that very soon it will be a physical place you can visit.

RACKET BOY
http://racketboy.com/
There's a definite Sega slant to Racket Boy, but it's a lot of fun.

RADIO SEGA
www.radiosega.net
If you're a fan of Sega music you'll love Radio Sega.

SEGA-16.COM
www.sega-16.com
Mega Drive site with some incredibly in-depth interviews.

RETRO 101
www.retro101.co.uk
It's fairly new, but Retro 101 has some informative articles.

RETRO GAMING RADIO
www.monroeworld.com
Superb monthly podcast that looks at the US game market.

RLLMUK FORUM
www.rllmukforum.com/index.php
All the latest games and a retro section with helpful members.

THE RUBBER BEERMAT
http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/themanor33/TRBv2/
Excellent Spectrum site that champions a lot of rare games.

SHOOT THE CORE
www.shootthecore.moonpod.com
This brilliant site loves shmups of all descriptions.

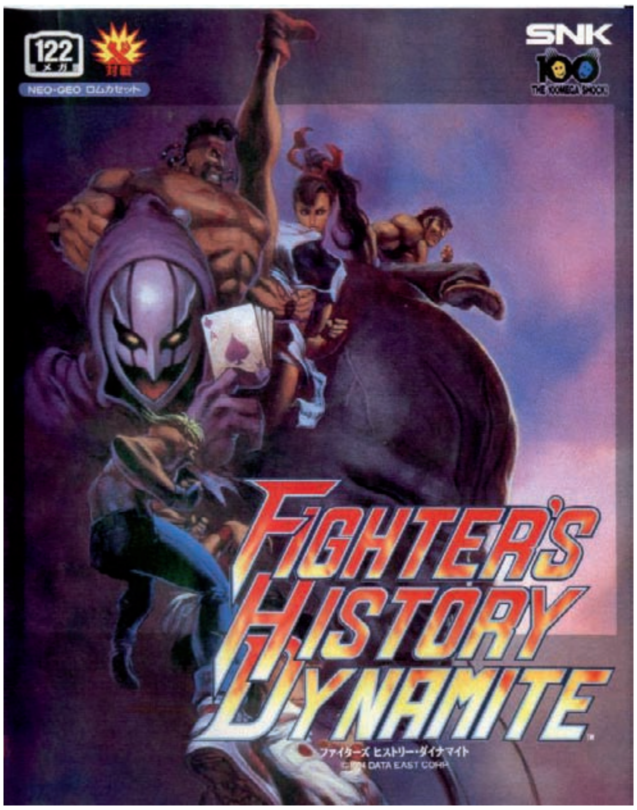
SHMUPS
www.shmups.com
Absolutely amazing website dedicated to the best gaming genre of all time.

VIDEOGAME MUSEUM
www.vgmuseum.com
Screenshots, game endings, cover scans, and reviews.

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
www.vc-reviews.com
Your one-stop shop for everything VC-related.

WORLD OF SPECTRUM
www.worldofspectrum.org
Superb Spectrum site that offers a friendly forum.

If you want to add your website to our expanding directory, please contact Darran at darran.jones@imagine-publishing.co.uk.



FIGHTER'S HISTORY DYNAMITE

This issue, we pay tribute to Data East's bizarre Fighter's History Dynamite, which recycled the company's seminal, fat, fire-breathing platform hero Karnov as its final boss and also upset Capcom. Anyway, this game is only worth playing if you hate Karnov, or like bizarre endings starring bulls and poorly disguised cross-dressers…



SCREEN 1
After defeating Karnov with his giant fists, a harassed-looking Marstorius dashes home in a skirt woven by the delicate fingers of cherubs working for just seven drachmas a day in an Eastern European sweatshop.



SCREEN 2
Following this arduous journey home, Marstorius finally arrives and sheepishly steps over the threshold, slyly poking his head around the door of his castle and calling out for his beautiful wife, Gorbachofio.



SCREEN 3
Following his appearance at the door, his wife, Gorbachofio – unimpressed by his 17-year absence – gets incredibly angry and begins to get into a snarling white-hot rage. She then transforms into her husband.



SCREEN 4
With temperatures approaching boiling point, the pair wrestle in a barrage of skirts, biceps and anger. However, as you'd probably expect, sexual tension and eroticism soon begin to take a hold of the loving couple.



SCREEN 5
Tragically, we discover that Marstorius is in fact insane, as the creature he thinks is his wife turns out to be a giant snarling bull instead. Hopefully he realises before… Well, we don't want to think about it to be honest.

It's a jungle out there. Swing through it



iPad

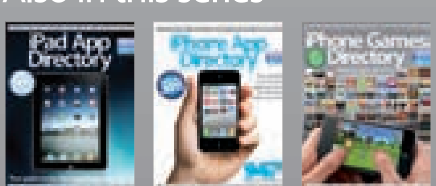
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Directory™

The definitive review listings for iPad, iPhone and Android apps

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